

Horrors in Culture & Entertainment

RUE-MORQUE

22ND
ANNIVERSARY
HALLOWEEN
ISSUE!

The Devil

Legacy in Horror

FEATURING
WILLIAM FRIEDKIN • GRADY HENDRIX
GAVIN BADDELEY • JEX BLACKMORE

PLUS!

The Church of Satan vs The Satanic Temple

The Devil in Movies, Music & More!
Satanic Panic!

ISSUE **190** SEPT/OCT 2019 CAN/US \$9.95



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SLASHER
FILMS

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TOM SAVINI'S
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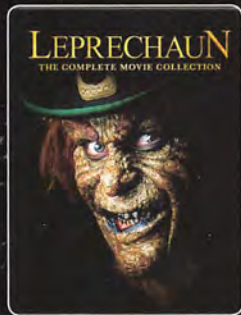
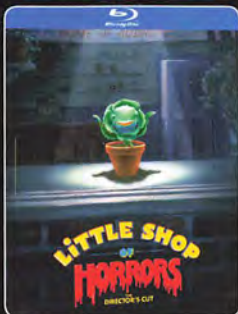
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This Halloween, *Rue Morgue* traces the ultimate boogeyman's changing face in cinema and culture with interviews with filmmaker William Friedkin, author Grady Hendrix, satanic artist Jex Blackmore, and satanic minister/historian Gavin Baddeley.

PLUS! Satan in cinema, the Devil's music, the Church of Satan vs The Satanic Temple, and more.

by **RODRIGO GUDIÑO**, **SEAN PLUMMER**, **ANDREA SUBISSATI**, **BENOIT BLACK** and **AARON VON LUPTON**

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Halloween again? It seems like only yesterday I threw out my mouldy jack o' lantern... oh wait, that was actually yesterday. But the "seasonal" housewares that adorn the Rue Morgue Manor all year long are starting to appear in stores even as I write this in sunny July, so it's once more time for us to spread our pages double-wide in our annual Halloween issue, and discuss what another year of *Rue Morgue* has brought.

Celebrating her first anniversary this fall is our YouTube channel, Rue Morgue TV. Translating a print periodical to video format is trickier than it sounds, but over the course of the 40+ episodes we've launched, we hope to have offered you a peek behind the curtain at some of the names who have appeared in the pages over the past 22 years. And dousing Alison Lang in goo at the end of her episode on melt films? 100% her idea. *Rue Morgue* doesn't create weirdos, but I can't deny that we seem to attract the very best of them.

Our branching out into the wicked world of online video content won't end with Rue Morgue TV, though – I'm pleased to announce our upcoming collaboration with MVD Entertainment Group: Midnight Movie Society. Launching in September, it's a streaming video-on-demand service that's curated to specialize in extreme underground, taboo and cult horror fare. We know our readers are well-versed in the classics and likely have DVD and Blu-ray collections that rival my own – think of Midnight Movie Society as your opportunity to get at the wilder and weirder stuff you won't find anywhere else.

In spite of fond memories and exciting things to come, I do have some sad news to impart. On July 18, the *Rue Morgue* family was shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Andrew Bailes, known in these pages as the Gore-Met. A columnist for upwards of seventeen years, Andrew's encyclopedic knowledge of the genre was an inspiration to many, and he will be missed.

Now, on to the task at hand. Horror's most celebrated monsters are the ones that can adapt to changing times to reflect changing fears – vampires, werewolves and zombies have been muddled, shaken and stirred for decades, and so too has the great granddaddy of sin: Satan himself. Of all the classic movie foes, the Devil is perhaps the most amorphous – whether he's personified as a goat, a powerful lawyer or a malicious entity, his intentions are pure malevolence. Evil for evil's sake? That's some badass shit.

What's more, narratives involving Satan force us to confront what evil even means, and by extension, the very nature of goodness. Just like the witch, who received the *Rue Morgue* deep dive treatment in *RM#178*, the Devil has been re-evaluated in current times and even embraced as an icon of resistance and agent of social change. It's all too easy to cast an action as "sin" without fully exploring the assumptions that come with that label, and if sin is in, as per the cliché, one can see why Satan has become the patron saint of all things deemed deviant (and that's something we weirdos know a thing or two about).

My favourite movies involving the Infernal One are the ones that see him sitting back, kicking up his hooves and letting humanity do his dirty work: the implication that there is untapped evil in all of us that just needs the right circumstances to blossom is a truly tantalizing one, and I'm thrilled to see it being tackled in horror as of late. Whether you prefer your devilry in horns or high heels, there's no denying the allure in living deliciously, whatever that might entail.

From one sinner to another, happy Halloween!

Andrea Subissati

ANDREA SUBISSATI
andrea@rue-morgue.com

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE

MARRS MEDIA INC. RUE-MORGUE.COM

1411 DUFFERIN STREET, TORONTO, ONTARIO, M6H 4C7, CANADA

PH: 416.651.9675 FAX: 416.651.6085 EMAIL: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM

FB: FACEBOOK.COM/RUEMORQUEMAGAZINE TWITTER: TWITTER.COM/RUEMORQUE

STAFF

PUBLISHER	EXECUTIVE EDITOR
RODRIGO GUDIÑO	ANDREA SUBISSATI
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR	MUSIC EDITOR
MONICA S. KUEBLER	AARON VON LUPTON
ART DIRECTOR	GAMES EDITOR
ANDREW WRIGHT	EVAN MILLAR
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER	STAFF WRITER
JAMIE BERARDI	SEAN PLUMMER
FINANCIAL CONTROLLER	HEAD ONLINE WRITER
MARCO PECOTA	MICHAEL GINGOLD
INTERNS	EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
SARAH GAROFALO	MADDI MCGILLVRA
LAURA HOKSTAD	SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER
MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS MANAGER	DAVE ALEXANDER
JODY INFURNARI	
PH: 905-985-0430	
E: jody@rue-morgue.com	



RUE MORGUE INTERNATIONAL

FABIEN DELAGE (FRANCE)	facebook.com/RueMorgueFrance
CHARLOTTE STEAR (UK)	facebook.com/RueMorgueUK
MOANER T. LAWRENCE (GERMANY)	facebook.com/RueMorgueGermany
AARON SOTO (MEXICO)	facebook.com/RueMorgueMexico

CONTRIBUTORS

BRENTON BENTZ	KACI HANSEN
BENOIT BLACK	JOEL HARLEY
JOHN W. BOWEN	RICK HIPSON
JESSICA BUCK	CLAIRE HORSNELL
JAMES BURRELL	YASMINA KETITA
PEDRO CABEZUELO	LAST CHANCE LANCE
BRYAN CHRISTOPHER	KEN MICHAELS
PAUL CORUPE	DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ
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DAKOTA DAHL	JEFF SZPIRGLAS
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RUE MORGUE #190 is dedicated to the memory of Andrew "The Gore-met" Bailes. RIP.

COVER: SATAN

Art by Rob Birchfield
Design by Andrew Wright

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



I WANT TO THANK you for *RM#189* being devoted to queer fear. It is yet another rallying cry for us weirdos to stick together, and Andrea's Note From Underground emphasizes that; I want her to get as political as she wants to with the magazine since as she says, horror is political by nature. Speaking personally, I had always considered myself to be a heterosexual man, but I have recently discovered that I am asexual. That is perhaps the least known sexual orientation and [refers] to someone who has no sexual feelings or desires, or who is not sexually attracted to anyone. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that I have been asexual for a long time. I could go on, but I will wrap this up by saying thank you *Rue Morgue* for being so awesome. May all of us weirdos, whether we are heterosexual, or LGBTQIA+, stick together to fight the monsters of hate and oppression.

KEVIN L. KENNEL, VIA EMAIL

I WAS VERY EXCITED to see your Queer Horror issue, especially the great cover art. However, the lack of coverage of actual queer horror seemed to stand out and left the issue feeling only half-baked. Where were the mentions of "straight"-forward gay and lesbian horror films like *Make a Wish*, *October Moon 1 and 2*, *Hellbent*, *Socket*, or the 1971 oddity *Sometimes Aunt Martha Does Dreadful Things*? What about a single David DeCoteau movie, who created his own homoerotic horror subgenre with *Voodoo Academy*, *The Brotherhood* and about 172 others? While the titles mentioned in your issue do have queer elements, they were all essentially straight studio films. Like so many other films that begin a new movement, the indie gay horror scene seems to have been completely overlooked. I'm hoping a future issue will allow for some coverage of this constantly expanding area of the horror genre.

MICHAEL BEUGLAS, VIA EMAIL

RUE MORGUE TV is my new favourite channel. You don't just talk horror... you're very intelligent with it.

@PATMUNSTER92, VIA TWITTER

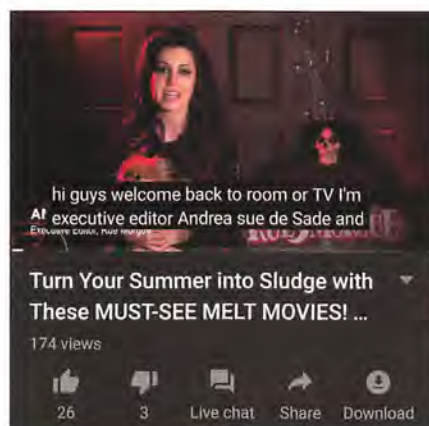
@RUEMORGUE: the #Queer Fear theme issue was wonderful, from Andrea's opening comments to @HomicidalKaci. And I'll side with @MonicaSKuebler in the VS debate with this issue as

case in point. Thanks for your vision of #horror #diversity, #expansion and #inclusion.

@RICHARDKWEEMS, VIA TWITTER

@RUEMORGUE: YouTube captions did an interesting thing to your Executive Editor's name

@GARYTHORN, VIA TWITTER



RE: VS ON RUE MORGUE TV: Wow! Great choices to defend! I really, really enjoyed this. But you're both wrong. The fight needs to be between *Haloween II* and *Hellraiser II: Hellbound*.

KILLER KEV'S FROM OUTER SPACE, VIA YOUTUBE

LOVE THE REWIND ZONE! Love Rue Morgue TV! Can't believe I've never seen this! Thank you Yasmina, you rock! Gonna go watch!

MALWOLFMOON, VIA YOUTUBE

I WANT TO START OFF by saying that I adore the magazine and have loved to flip through the beautifully curated ghoulish pages since 2007. The newest issue, *RM#189*, featuring a rainbow-sweater wearing Freddy Krueger was a bold move that had me raising eyebrows at what I would find inside. The article was phenomenal, as *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* is hands down my favourite. *Nightmare 2* was so different than the first film and I found it to be smart, sexy and

innovative... I thought this initially when I saw it on VHS back in the day. Great job for shining a light on that important moment in horror film history. What I didn't care for so much was the article on the horror drag queens the Boulet Brothers. I understand they are the "queer" perspective on a genre that is very heterosexual for the most part but, for me, it seems like a vapid homogenized attempt at using the genre as a platform for pseudo fame. In no way am I saying these horror queens shouldn't do their thing, but I have encountered way more devoted and talented horror queens, such as Love Connie, who has used *Jaws* and *Apocalypse Now* in her amazing one-woman cult shows, and Christine, who's smart and vicious trans animal drag queen shows push the boundaries of art and shock. Those queens remind me of the first time I saw *Multiple Maniacs* on VHS. I feel that the magazine tends to skim the surface and present a very narrow view of what should be more about innovative underground art. Horror has evolved but there are some really cool underground subcultures that are born as resistance and preservation for us purists.

SOME HORROR GUY WHO LIVES IN LOS ANGELES, VIA EMAIL

WHAT WERE WE DOING at @RueMorgue Headquarters? You'll find out soon enough... if you dare!

@BENJAMINRIVERS, VIA TWITTER



WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM OR:

POST MORTEM

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE # 190

In November of 1997, famed Italian director Dario Argento made a run for political office in Rome.

In April of this year, Canadian grave robber Lucas Dawe, 20, was caught boiling a human skeleton he stole from All Saints Parish in Newfoundland, and drinking the broth.

Rebecca Toolan, who plays Fox Mulder's mother in *The X-Files* is, in reality, only one year older than David Duchovny.

The mouth of the White Worm seen in the tunnel toward the end of Ken Russell's *The Lair of the White Worm* was actually a painted-over Volkswagen Beetle hood that bears an uncanny resemblance to the mouth of a snake.

In 2017, Blake Leibel, 36, the son of a wealthy Canadian real estate tycoon, was charged with scalping his girlfriend Iana Kasian and draining her of her blood. Six years prior, Leibel had published a graphic novel called *Syndrome*, in which a serial killer decapitated women and hung them from the ceiling.

Despite playing the lead character in Bernard Rose's *Paperhouse* (1988), Charlotte Burke never appeared in any film again.

Nomophobia refers to fears that arise from being out of a phone's range of service, not having one's phone charged, having no credit on one's phone or misplacing it. It is believed that over 50 percent of cellphone users are affected by this phobia.

As he was dying, Alfred Hitchcock said, "One never knows the ending. One has to die to know exactly what happens after death, although Catholics have their hopes."

The phone number (555-2368) of the house where Jill Johnson is babysitting in 1979's *When a Stranger Calls* is the same home phone number used in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

The original VHS box artwork for Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1987) featured an alien flipping the middle finger; tapes distributed in the US were provided with an extra finger that could be glued in place to make it look like it was making a "peace" sign instead.

In 2005, sisters Mildred Bowman, 62, and Alice Wardle, 68, died in Benidorm, Spain, after their fold-up bed collapsed and trapped them for four days.

The distinctive TARDIS sound effect from *Doctor Who* is officially classified as a piece of music and was created by rubbing the bass strings of a piano with a key and playing it back at 10% speed.

Pan's Labyrinth director Guillermo del Toro once claimed that watching Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* drove him to become a vegetarian for four years.

COMPILED BY BENOIT BLACK
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT?
SEND IT TO: INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM

RECORDING OFFICER

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HOMICIDE ☐

EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORQUE'S
SOCIAL MEDIA

Who would play the *Devil* in a horror movie based on your life?

Keanu Reeves wearing those perfectly tailored John Wick suits. I'm Catholic, so my Satan had best be God's most beautiful angel.

MAGPIE, VIA TWITTER

Bill Moseley, of course, because he is the Devil and he's here to do the Devil's work.

JJ ARPASI, VIA TWITTER

A bottle of vodka.

HENRIK.HONK, VIA INSTAGRAM

Bruce Campbell. The answer to any casting question is always Bruce Campbell!

SEAN BURQUE, VIA FACEBOOK

David Lynch! Nothing would make sense and I'd love every minute of it.

MARCELL FRASER, VIA FACEBOOK

John Waters.

JOHN STALTER, VIA FACEBOOK

Rutger Hauer... ahh shit.

HUSKERFAN, VIA TWITTER



FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



"YOU VS. THE GUY SHE TOLD YOU NOT TO WORRY ABOUT."

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@210SABOY, VIA TWITTER

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HALLOWEEN'S HERITAGE

They say every lie has a grain of truth to it, and horror fiction is no exception. Short of movies that dramatize historical events (*The Hills Have Eyes*, *Open Water*, *The Girl Next Door*, etc.), much of our genre has its roots in reality, often in more nuanced ways. Shadowland is an exploration of these narrative origin stories, with an eye to uncover the cultural implications that appear in the transition from real life to urban legend to film.

Halloween is a perfect time to kick off this new column, being a holiday with its roots in the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. The first of November was a day designated by Pope Gregory III to honour all saints, which encouraged superstitious cultures to spend the night before (known as All Hallows Eve, and later, Halloween) preparing for ancestral visits – lighting bonfires and wearing costumes was believed to ward off ghosts. Nowadays, depending on your age, Halloween has more to do with killer costumes than killer spirits, making it fertile ground for horror stories that can take advantage of the element of disguise and the spook factor of the autumnal setting.

The most obvious example, of course, is

John Carpenter's seminal *Halloween* franchise, where Michael Myers, the long-lost troubled child of Haddonfield, returns to his hometown to prey on unsuspecting teens, going largely undetected on the day of costumes and generalized creepiness. While sequel *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982) remains an oddball in the franchise due to its omission of Myers as the killer, it tackles modern themes of the holiday by focussing its narrative on a series of haunted masks that bring about a ritualistic ceremony, hearkening back to Halloween's spiritual roots.

The idea of Halloween being a community celebration came about in the late 1800s, when Americans borrowed from the Irish and English traditions of going door to door in search of goodies. By the mid-1900s, Halloween had become a nationwide night of vandalism and debauchery to the point where town officials redirected the festivities toward youth. The idea that a delicious "treat" would appease neighbourhood kids and protect one's household from "tricks" took hold, linking the holiday to childhood and mischief from then on.

Kevin S. Tenney's *Night of the Demons* (1988) tackled this facet of Halloween, incor-



porating what's now become the holiday's primary method of observance with a narrative about a group of teens inadvertently awakening evil spirits with a Halloween night séance. What's more, the film also makes reference to a modern urban legend that emerged over the years – that of hiding razor blades in apples given to unsuspecting trick or treaters.

Every lie has a grain of truth to it... tune in to next issue's Shadowland for more.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

Body Horror

JEFF SAUNDERS

LOCATION: Penndel, Pennsylvania

INSTAGRAM: @jeffsaunderstattoo



◀ A self-confessed film buff, Pennsylvania-based tattooer Jeff Saunders brings a unique blend of comic, neotraditional and realist styles to some of the genre's most iconic characters. Inspired by the gothic Victorian era of art as well as Todd

McFarlane's comic flair, with heavy black and high-contrast highlights, Saunders has tackled designs straight out of the movies as well as dark, conceptual artwork that would be at home on any horror fan's wall. "Right now, my favourite piece would have

to be one of my most recent; *Terrifier!*" says the artist. "Art's no ordinary clown, know what I mean?"

ANDREA SUBISSATI

NEEDFUL THINGS



1 HALLOWEEN SUIT AND TIE SET

\$59.99 USD

Puttin' on the ritz doesn't have to be the pits! This stylish slim-fit ensemble from Suitmeister includes jacket, pants and matching tie to add maximum spooky spiff to your seasonal wardrobe. kohls.com

2 STEPHEN KING BOOKMARKS

\$6 – \$7 USD

Who better to mark your place in the latest Stephen King best-seller than the author himself, or one of his most iconic characters? Hand-drawn, double-sided and measuring 2 x 7 inches, these unique bookmarks will ensure you always keep your page... or else! astrangerdream.com

3 CANDY CORN FLATS

\$55 USD

Satisfy your sweet tooth with a pair of candy corn flats that'll add some Halloween to your wardrobe all year long. 100% vegan and sugar-free, these beauties will cause compliments instead of cruelty (and cavities). strangevlt.com

4 ZOMBIE COCKTAIL GLASS

\$24.99 USD

This magic zombie glass features Donn Beach's authentic 1934 zombie punch cocktail recipe and undead artwork by Nik Poliwko and Sveta Shubina that appears when cold liquid is poured into it! Comes with custom swizzle stick, tiki cocktail recipe card and collector's display box; a perfect gift for the necromixologist in your afterlife. sexandmonsters.com

5 GOAT HEAD BERET

\$21.95 USD

A Baphomet beatnik beret, but not the kind you'd find in a second-hand store! Whether you're a follower of the Infernal One or a slave to satanic fashion, our friends at Kleepsville666 have you and your horns covered. kleepsville666.com



CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

COLLECTIBLE SCREEN PRINT POSTERS BY GREY MATTER ART

Movie posters have always been part and parcel of the horror movie experience and, in the case of some films, are even superior to what made it on screen. Naturally, many companies have caught wind of the demand for high-quality horror poster artwork, and are offering it as screen prints. Using a process where mesh layers are used to transfer inks onto heavy stock paper for extremely vivid and detailed designs, these prints are usually produced in limited runs, making them highly collectible. One such company using this method is Grey Matter Art.

Founded in New York in 2013 by Mike Gregory and Jared Dobbs, Grey Matter has been on the vanguard of the art form's resurgence, on which it built its company from the ground up.

"Being new to the world of entrepreneurship, we discovered the first of several obstacles was obtaining licensing rights," Gregory recalls of the early days. "Working on smaller titles gave us an opening, starting with the poster for *Cannibal Holocaust* by artist Randy Ortiz. Over the months, we began to get our foot in the door, and worked on developing more recognizable and cult titles,

as well as attracting new and diverse artists."

Grey Matter's second year in business saw a big push; Gregory and Dobbs were able to enlist the talents of some of the most established artists in the field, including Jason Edmiston, Francesco Francavilla, Matt Ferguson and Grzegorz Domaradzki.

A standout offering is Mike Saputo's take on *28 Days Later*, which depicts a newly awakened Jim wandering a desolate London, depicted with striking colour and asymmetry. Sara Deck's artwork for *The Exorcist* was printed in two 24 X 36-inch variants: a regular coloured version (125 printed) and eerie black and white (edition of 50). Grey Matter has also released several prints from Rue Morgue's own

Ghoulish Gary Pullin, including *Evil Dead 2*, *Halloween* (2018), and *Alien*.

The future is bright for Grey Matter Art, and Gregory is eager to take his business on the road, touring many major genre conventions. "With everything moving so fast, there are a lot of opportunities that lie ahead for Grey Matter Art," he says "and we see many good things to come for poster

collectors and lovers of pop culture in general. So stay tuned!"

Grey Matter Art is available at greymatterart.com, and will be attending New York Comic Con 2019 in October, where they will have many exclusive items for sale.

CHRIS HAMMOND



VINTAGE AND CLASSIC

ROSEMARY'S BABY BY IRA LEVIN

(First published by Random House, Inc. in 1967)

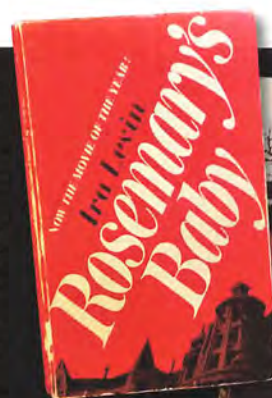
The second novel from New York-born author Ira Levin, *Rosemary's Baby* tells of a young couple – Rosemary Woodhouse and her struggling actor husband, Guy – who move into a charming old New York apartment house. Unbeknownst to Rosemary, the building is inhabited by members of a satanic coven, and the couple's elderly neighbours have offered Guy a chance at success if he permits his wife to be impregnated by the Devil and give birth to Satan's son.

Glowingly reviewed by author Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*), the novel was adapted into a massively successful and critically lauded 1968 film starring Mia Farrow and John Cassavetes and directed by

Roman Polanski, with William Castle (who had purchased the movie rights) as producer. Levin would follow up *Rosemary's Baby* with another horror-themed novel, the equally thought-provoking *The Stepford Wives*, in 1972.

While prices can vary widely, copies of the first edition 1967 hardcover can fetch up to \$100 if found with undamaged dust jackets, while 1968 paperback editions from Dell Publishing Co., Inc. and Pan Books can be found for under \$10 on eBay and online book sites such as AbeBooks.

JAMES BURRELL



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DEMON TO SOME, ANGEL TO OTHERS. THIS HALLOWEEN, *RUE MORQUE* TRACES THE ULTIMATE BOOGEYMAN'S CHANGING FACE IN CINEMA AND CULTURE

Speak of the Devil

BY RODRIGO GUDIÑO AND SEAN PLUMMER



THE DEVIL, SATAN, THE ULTIMATE BOOGEYMAN. HE WAS THE HORROR BEFORE THERE WAS HORROR, THE PERSONIFICATION OF EVIL ITSELF.

No surprise that he came to the genre early, drawn like a fallen angel to an infernal flame, but the truth is that the Devil was here first. Throughout the ages and across cultures, Satan – literally “adversary” – was present like a lurking shadow that spread its wings the very moment the first human being formulated the concept of goodness.

Ironically, the Satan of storybooks – red tail, cloven hooves and horns – owes a huge debt to the very people who resisted him most: Christians. The aptly titled Medieval Dark Ages placed Satan centre stage in a culture of fear and paranoia that reached a hysterical shriek during the witch burning era of 17th-century Puritan Europe and America. Two centuries later,

the Devil stood front and centre in the world’s very first horror movie (see sidebar), and shadowed the rise of horror cinema like a demon reborn in the flickering images of projected celluloid.

After decades of flirting with the counterculture, the Devil hit Hollywood superstardom in the late 1960s and early ’70s with the unholy triumvirate of *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*, blockbuster movies that drew from different mythologies and fears about Satan (see sidebar). Music followed a decade later, after sinister elements in rock ‘n’ roll gave the Devil his soundtrack with heavy metal music and the Satanic Panic that came with it (see sidebar).

Satan reigned supreme throughout the 1980s but, like all things, he too was doomed to be a passing fad. Fears of the apocalyptic end times evap-

orated with an uneventful turn of the millennium on January 1, 2000. The world took on new interests and new fears, and with the coming of internet culture, the Devil soon became a caricature of a bygone era.

But not for long.

Like a long lost prophecy suddenly and chillingly fulfilled, the past years have rekindled interest in the Devil from artistic, cultural and spiritual quarters. Satan's soundtrack has also expanded from heavy metal to ritual music, doo wop, rockabilly, house, electronica and more.

The past decade has seen a surge of interest in satanic cinema, from *House of the Devil* and Rob Zombie's *Lords of Salem* to *The Blackcoat's Daughter*, *The Witch* and *The Devil's Candy*. Today, the Devil is in the midst of a second coming, as exemplified in movies such as the upcoming *Antrum: The Deadliest Film Ever Made*, and TV shows such as *Lucifer* and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. This time, however, the long-feared Devil has also gotten a cultural makeover, thanks to groups such as the Satanic Temple, whose efforts to recast this ancient boogeyman into a figure of empowerment and religious tolerance are showcased in the recently released documentary *Hail Satan?*

For this cover story, *Rue Morgue* assembled a round-table of artists, historians and provocateurs: Grady Hendrix is a co-founder of the New York Asian Film Festival-turned-author with books *We Sold Our Souls* and *Satan Loves You*; he is also the co-writer of the new horror comedy *Satanic Panic*, released this month. Jex Blackmore is a satanic artist and former spokesperson for the Satanic Temple who was expelled from that organization for calling for Donald Trump's execution during a public performance. Gavin Baddeley is an ordained minister in the Church of Satan and author of *Lucifer Rising: A Book of Sin*, *Devil Worship*, & *Rock 'n' Roll*.

Last, but certainly not least, Academy Award-winning director William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*) has recently returned to the subject that made him famous with the documentary *The Devil and Father Amorth*.

Grady, let's start with you. Much of your fiction that involves Satan draws from pretty conventional conceptions of the Devil: i.e. virgin sacrifice or the idea of selling one's soul for success. Why do you think these themes still resonate in 2019?

GRADY HENDRIX: Fear of a satanic conspiracy is a one-size-fits-all conspiracy. If you go back far enough – whether it's the Cathars or it's the Jews – it's this idea that you're not in charge of your life. The things that happen to you aren't your fault, there's a giant conspiracy of people who struggle to keep you down. The world's controlled by one percent of the population in this conspiracy; you will never be able to go anywhere because you're not part of the conspiracy, so your life is hopeless and helpless and out of



Satan, Past And Present: (top) From Gustave Dore's illustrations for *Dante's Inferno*, to (opposite) Benjamin Christensen's 1922 film *Haxan*, and the 2018 heavy metal occult horror novel by Grady Hendrix (pictured above).

"FEAR OF A SATANIC CONSPIRACY IS A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL CONSPIRACY."

Grady Hendrix

your control. But also, look on the bright side – those people probably sold their soul and they'll burn in Hell! So that's sort of been an eternal human fantasy all the way back to medieval times, probably. It's just the actors in it that change; it's [now] an international drug ring, pedophiles, white slavers, Catholics, Jews, the communists, the one percent, the New World Order... The only thing that's really changed is [that] those conspiracies used to be sort of a fever dream of the more right-leaning part of the population and, these days – probably since the '60s – the left-leaning side of the population has really bought into those as well.

Has the mainstream perception of satanic influence in music and pop culture changed since the Satanic Panic of the 1980s?

GAVIN BADDELEY: Definitely. I don't think very many people take the idea of the satanic conspiracy seriously anymore, and I think the existence of the Satanic Temple is proof positive of that. If they'd attempted what they're doing now back in the 1980s, they'd probably have been shot. I think the world is much more divided now, and there certainly still is a lunatic fringe of very vocal Christians who regard the Devil as existing and there being a satanic conspiracy and so forth. But I think in the mainstream familiarity breeds, if not contempt, then comfort. The people who grew up playing *Dungeons & Dragons* and being told that this was a gateway to the Devil are now middle-aged people. Some of them are in positions of authority, so you can't really push that mythology anymore, that horse has bolted. The thing that made the satanic conspiracy theory stick is the satanic ritual abuse myth, and it's

now just become so obvious that the people who are abusing children are Christian clergy and various other religious figures. You can't make the satanic ritual abuse myth stick anymore.

How have horror films contributed to contemporary society's view of Satan?

JEX BLACKMORE: There have been more nuanced depictions of the Devil in popular culture today than there have been in the past, and I think that's really valuable because, despite the cartoonish depiction of Satan that has been pervasive, there's this horror perception of something lurking in the corners that you should all the time be afraid of, and I think that plays into this metaphor of being tempted to sin. But there are also more playful perceptions of the Devil that can be relegated to cultural differences and interpretations of morality that are really fun. Kenneth Anger's *Lucifer Rising* is a kind of film that is rooted in spectacle, and I think that's something really compelling about youth fascination with the Devil as a spectacle in and of itself. *The Witch* is a film that I really loved because there is a question in the end about who is liberating who, who's really in charge, and it counters this Christian fear. It doesn't give you a definitive answer about the path forward, which I think is a good way to leave viewers. And even a more comical representation of the Devil like on *South Park*, you have this figure that is very much playful but seems a lot more grounded in many capacities in real life, and I think that's also important to recognize. Often we think the Devil is part of this Christian mythology that doesn't exist, but in reality it's deeply embedded in our daily lives whether or not we like it, because of the people we have dictating and running our country. So that's important to recognize as well.

GB: In any kind of media you've got the problem of chicken and egg, in as much as most films reflect the culture that created them more than they impact on it. An obvious exception would be *The Exorcist*, which is a film that came very much from a deliberately evangelical Catholic position and did effectively revive the exorcism myth and did a lot of damage by doing that. They did a re-launch of it, some kind of anniversary a few years back and I didn't go – I'm not a big fan of the film if I'm honest – but I knew a few people who did go, and if you remember when *The Exorcist* first screened, there were people screaming and fainting and claiming to be possessed by watching the film. The people I know who went to see the revival screening said everyone was laughing. So these things date. In terms of depictions of the Devil, you tend to see at least as many depictions in comedies as a mischievous/sexual figure than you do of the Devil being the ultimate evil or a monster.

Jex, you once said you hoped that *The Witch* would spark a transformation in the way



The Devil You Say: Modern depictions of Satan cast him in a variety of ways, including the ridiculous, the sinister and the sublime.

viewers see Satanism. How successful do you think the film was in doing that?

JB: I think it inspired an investigation of the value of the Devil as a cultural icon, a figure of liberation, or of repression and dominance. And I think that the questions that brought up – and the back and forth about whether it was a story about feminism and a pro-satanic message or not – I think that's actually a very good place to be getting to because at least we're talking about the considerations of the moral value of the Devil. And I think that is progress in the capacity of horror films typically being something that can scare you and you can dismiss as either being fantasy or reflective of a Christian world view.

Some of the most notable horror movies dealing with Satanism, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* and *Rosemary's Baby* among them, present a very Catholic conception of the Devil. Did these movies ultimately help or harm Satanism?

GB: Films can have a powerful impact, and my

suspicion is, yes, *The Exorcist* chased people back into the Church. I think *Rosemary's Baby* is very much a product of the God Is Dead era; it's a straight horror movie, it's not religious propaganda. I think, appropriately enough, *The Omen* is cynical with its use of propaganda in as much as it's tongue-in-cheek; it's not serious, in the way that I can't believe most evangelists believe the rubbish they spout. So it's very much a film from that perspective. And it certainly established 666 as the Number of the Beast, which I understand is inaccurate. It's a mistranslation, I believe it's [actually] 616.

What function does Satan serve in 2019, either in art or in daily life?

GB: The Church of Satan has really done a lot of things to be thankful for. I think the Anton LaVey version of the Church of Satan and the early Temple of Set and all that, I think they were very much products of their time, kind of male chauvinist, boring, full of themselves, kind of like everyone was in the late '60s into the ear-

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EVEN THE DEVIL HAS ADMIRERS, AND YOU CAN FIND THEM AT THE CHURCH OF SATAN AND THE SATANIC TEMPLE. TWO GROUPS WHO DON'T ALWAYS AGREE ON HOW BEST TO SERVE THE IDEALS OF THE DARK ONE

Satan's Children

BY SEAN PLUMMER

Dave Harris

ANTON LAVEY FOUNDED THE CHURCH OF SATAN IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, ON APRIL 30, 1966. The former carnie and devoted showman used the platform for playful jabs at the morality and hypocrisies of the status quo, but the Church – and indeed, Satanism itself – went quiet in the decades that followed as he retreated from public life. It wasn't until The Satanic Temple emerged in the last decade, with its political and social activism combined with media savvy, that Satanism began to be noticed by the mainstream – but in ways the original Church wasn't too happy about.

Rue Morgue spoke to Church of Satan magister Dave Harris and Satanic Temple spokesperson Lucien Greaves about their competing takes on some of modern Satanism's most contentious issues.

ON LAVEYAN SATANISM

Church of Satan: "The biggest appeal is its grounding in reality and its emphasis on individualism and self-empowerment. With so many collectivist philosophies permeating the social structure in 2019, Satanism stands alone as a champion of individualism and one's ability to carve out a path for oneself."

The Satanic Temple: "There are certain core values that persist from LaVeyan Satanism into the Satanic Temple: personal sovereignty, free inquiry, the rejection of arbitrary authority, and a non-theistic contextualization. [But] much of what LaVey said was contradictory and self-negating to the point that he used his philosophy of personal independence and rebellion to advocate for autocratic governance."

ON ORGANIZED RELIGION

CoS: "We're not opposed to organized religion. We *are* an organized religion. We're opposed to all forms of spirituality because it's all just silly pipe dreams. Satanists are atheists, and our religion is a carnal one; a religion of the flesh. Life in the here, and now is where we find our happiness."

TST: "The Satanic Temple's fight is not against religion; it is against superstition and authoritarianism. We are a religion that values the individual's sovereignty and encourages the cultivation of the individual will and self-determination."

ON MAGIC

CoS: "Magic serves as much or as little purpose for the modern-day Satanist as they individually see fit. And magic, as defined in *The Satanic Bible*, means many different things. People employ lesser magic every day, whether they realize it or not. They groom themselves, they tailor their behaviour to situations, they change their speech patterns to affect the moment. This is all magic."

TST: "The short answer is that magic has no place in modern Satanism. Some define 'magic' so broadly – as any act of will that manifests its intended result in the real world – that merely having tea in the morning could be considered an act of magic."

ON POLITICAL ACTIVISM

CoS: "Every Satanist is an individual, and individuals' needs differ. Thus, there can be no unified satanic political agenda because no two Satanists' political philosophies are the same."

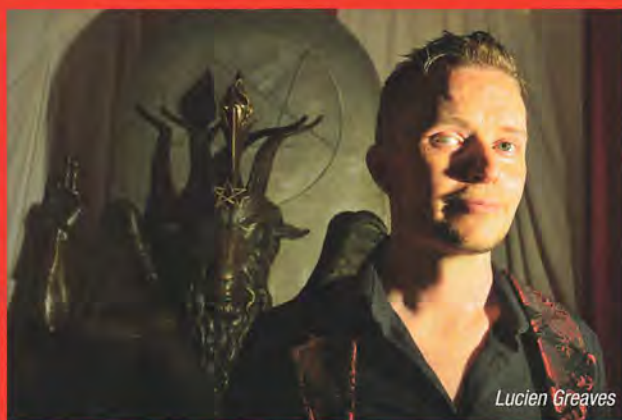
TST: "We are apolitical insofar as we will not align with a particular political party, but we do have well-defined affirmative values of our own. When theocrats openly seek to unify the world under a single religious identity, it would simply be cowardly and laughably unconvincing of us to proclaim our failure to engage as a principled example of respecting the separation between Church and State."

ON WHAT THE OTHER SIDE IS DOING

CoS: "[The animosity between TST and CoS] stems from their feeble attempts to appropriate our name for their nonsense. Will it ever be resolved? I don't

know and I don't care."

TST: "The animosity is derived from the fact that the Church of Satan feels entitled to sole ownership over the religious identification of Satanism. The Church of Satan simply is not active as an organization, and they are unaware of what it means to operate as one. We have no interest in carrying on or fuelling the conflict, however, as it only serves to feed a misimpression that we are institutions of equal status."



Lucien Greaves

IN 1973, HE DIRECTED *THE EXORCIST*. NOW, THE ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKER EXPLAINS WHAT BROUGHT HIM BACK FOR A FINAL EXORCISM

The Devil & William Friedkin

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

Let's talk about *The Devil and Father Amorth*. In the film, you were witness to a real-life exorcism and you spoke to experts about it. What are your personal conclusions about demonic possession?

I have no idea. I believe that there is a possibility that it could be some kind of a disease for which there is no medical name right now, but that there might be in the future. I had three of the leading psychiatrists in this country talking about the film, and how the Diagnostic Manual of Medicine (which is the psychiatric textbook) now recognizes possession. If somebody comes in or is brought to a psychiatrist and they believe they're possessed, the psychiatrist doesn't say, "No, you're not really possessed, that's a delusion. We're going to give you a little bit of talking therapy and some medication." They treat it as demonic possession. I'm not sure the exact number, but I think there are around 400 diseases recognized by the DSM, and possession is now one of them.

Is that your personal opinion, that it's a medical thing?

I have no idea. I'm not a Catholic. I wasn't Catholic at the time I made *The Exorcist*, but I made *The Exorcist* as a believer. A believer in the teachings of Jesus, not necessarily in the Catholic Church, but teachings of Jesus as they've come to us in the New Testament. And I strongly believe in those teachings and so I made the film with that mindset. I did not make *The Exorcist* as a cynic and I didn't speak to Father Amorth as a cynic. I spoke to him as a man that I admired very much; the most profoundly spiritual man I've ever met, and he believed he was dealing with the Devil and demonic possession. It wasn't something that I wanted to do to debunk him; I wanted to see how the two other medical disciplines felt about what he was doing, both psychiatry and neuroscience — and to my amazement, these top neuroscientists had no idea what affliction this woman [in the documentary] had. They had never seen symptoms like that before! I asked them if I had brought this woman to them, would

they give her an MRI, and they said no, there's no point. Because while everything originates in the brain, this does not appear to be a disease of the brain — this is something else. That's essentially what they say, all of them, in the course of the interviews that I did with them. I had no idea what the opinion of neurosurgeons or psychiatrists would be.

Were you swayed one way or the other about the existence of evil?

Of course! I believe that there's good and evil in every one of us, absolutely. Everything from road rage to murder. We hear often about people committing unspeakable acts of evil who would never have done anything like that in the past — it has become my belief that there is both good and evil in all of us, constantly fighting for our better angels to thrive and succeed.

Do you believe that dabbling in the subject of Satan can evoke dark forces, even if it's in the arts?

I don't dabble in the subject. The only thing I've ever done on the subject is the film *The Exorcist*, which is a work of fiction, and the interview with Father Amorth, which I did because I happened to be in Italy at the time. He was the Vatican exorcist for 31 years and I thought that since I'm over there, perhaps I can meet and have a conversation with him and that's how it came about.

So you believe in the existence of evil, not as an external supernatural force but something that is innate, the same as goodness?

I don't know. I don't think there's anyone alive or dead that can give you a totally convincing answer on that subject because we really don't know anything. We have no idea about how we got here, what we're doing here. Is there a Heaven and a Hell? Is there an afterlife at all? Is there a God? What is the nature of God? There is nobody – from Thomas Aquinas to Bertrand Russell to Saint Paul or anyone you can name – with a definitive answer about that question. My own belief is that good and evil exist in all of us; that's just my instinctive belief. I have no concrete proof of it. You see things happening every day that are inexplicable, and then you go back to the obvious example, which is what Adolf Hitler was able to achieve with the German people in the 1930s. There's no explanation how a man who is clearly so profoundly evil could lead an entire nation down the path to Hell along with him, and this is not a nation of imbeciles and fools. They were a very educated and intelligent people and they followed Adolf Hitler into Hell. Why? To me, it comes from the evil that exists in every human being that is right below the surface. But I think that there's goodness as well and it's like a constant struggle. Those are my beliefs, but I have no evidence of any of the things I just mentioned to you.

Are you personally open to the possibility of the existence of supernatural evil?

I'm open to almost everything. There are no ultimate answers to the mysteries of life.

There's a growing movement, I'm referring to groups like the Satanic Temple, that have adopted the satanic image as a force for personal empowerment. What are your thoughts on this?

Anton LaVey and satanic movements like his have been around in many cultures for a long time. There are many people, for example, who believe in the existence of the Antichrist. The people who go around worshipping ideas like that need help! You can get people in large groups to believe in almost any damn thing you come up with.

In your opinion, do you think the figure of Satan could ever be a force of good? Have you



Giving The Devil His Due: Contrary to popular belief, *The Exorcist* was embraced by the Catholic Church.

ever seen anyone take it positively?

No. Father Amorth believes that Satan was a spirit, not physical. There is no Devil according to Father Amorth, there's just the spirit of evil. If he had had conversations with the Devil, he claimed, through the people – that's thousands of people that he treated who believed that they were possessed – he would be able to confer through them with the Devil, but he could never confirm with them what he's seen, other than the distorted physical manifestations of the people who came to see him. He had never seen a figure called Satan. Satan is spirit, the Devil is spirit not physical.



In your experience, which is a greater harm to society; the idea of Satan himself or any fundamentalist efforts to squash the subject matter entirely?

I don't believe the subject matter should be squashed, but there are very few people that know anything about it. There are all kinds of *connoisseurs*; people who pretend to know and understand Satan and the nature of evil, and

from my reading of most of this stuff, it's worthless. There was a story today on [news site] the Drudge Report about a cleric in Columbia having an entire city in Columbia exorcised, dropping holy water from helicopters, stuff like that. And there's just so much bullshit about exorcism and possession that it's very difficult to make it a field of study. One is left to one's own devices as to whether or not you believe that stuff. I believe that Father Amorth was the opposite of that. Father Amorth is the most spiritual man I've ever known.

How much did *The Exorcist's* success do you credit to good filmmaking and how much do you credit to its subject matter?

I think you can credit both, probably equally. I mean, there was a great curiosity about the subject. There's not much that had come out about it before; [there's] *The Exorcist* novel and the film and of course many more people



Divine Intervention: "Father Amorth was the most spiritual man I've ever known," says William Friedkin (left).

saw the film all over the world. They're curious about it because even though nothing is really known, there's this great curiosity about all of those things: the afterlife and the supernatural. There is curiosity and very little knowledge.

Why do you think humanity needs Satan? Is there a purpose that he serves?

Yes. If you believe that there is a force for goodness in the world, it follows that there would be a force of evil. We've seen examples of both; there are examples of good and evil in almost everyone we know, throughout history and in our own families and our friends. There is a source for good that keeps things at an even keel because nature is balanced, so there's probably a force for evil and people are curious about that, so they'll take their information wherever they can get it.

So you've been talking about *The Exorcist* your whole life; I'm curious to know how people of non-Christian faith respond to the film.

Well, obviously, it was seen by more non-Christians than Christians. Even atheists, people who have no particular belief system are curious about the supernatural. Not necessarily ready to accept it, but curious. And especially in certain films that have dealt with it, because film is the most popular form of entertainment. So there was a great deal of curiosity when *Rosemary's Baby* came out. But there have not been a lot of

films that I can cite on the subject that are worth a damn.

So Christians and non-Christians reacted to *The Exorcist* the same way in your experience?

People react as individuals. They don't react out of some real or imagined philosophical viewpoint. Obviously the success of *The Exorcist* came about because people were extremely moved by it and frightened by it, and this has gone on for almost 50 years. Which is a long time for a movie to still be in the conversation.

"THERE'S JUST SO MUCH BULLSHIT ABOUT EXORCISM AND POSSESSION THAT IT'S VERY DIFFICULT TO MAKE IT A FIELD OF STUDY."

William Friedkin

That's a good point, because the 1980s saw this proliferation of Satan in the public consciousness. We were seeing Satan everywhere; it was in music, it was in fashion, it was on MTV, and there was a moral panic surrounding it.

There are people who know nothing really about it, who seize on it as a subject of exploitation. But as I point out in the documentary I did on Father Amorth, about 600,000 people a year – accord-

ing to the major newspapers and television stations in Italy – had sought the help of an exorcist in Italy. Now, that's not true of the United States.

What are the figures like in the States?

I don't know, it's not published. The Catholic Church gives out very little information about exorcisms. But the Church should not give out information about this stuff; it's a very private matter, one that comes under the heading of mental illness, in some way, and it's not really a subject for entertainment. So I support the idea that the Church has very little to say publicly about it.

Do you consider yourself a superstitious man at all?

I don't know if it's superstition, but I certainly believe that there is a creator. I don't believe that the explanation for human existence is anything more or less than a big bang. You know, what was it that caused the Big Bang? I don't have an image of God as male or female, or some guy with a long beard sitting on a cloud or something, but I believe there is a creative force behind humanity. That's just my private belief.

So, if you're not trying to sway audiences to one side or the other, what's your role in all this? You're not trying to frighten people, you're not trying to send people to church, you're not trying to shame people into atonement...

No, that's true. All I tried to do with those films is say, "Look, here is this. I'm curious about this. Perhaps you might be as well."

"IT'S MY HOPE THAT PEOPLE HAVE A LITTLE MORE UNDERSTANDING OF THE BREADTH OF CONTEMPORARY SATANISM."

Jex Blackmore

ly '70s who were on the fringes. Everyone had to be their own ad man, so it made them all come off as too big for their britches and pedantic. But look, *Michelle Remembers* – that book would have been a film if not for a lawsuit by the Church of Satan or Anton LaVey specifically and Michelle Smith's father. And that's great! That book has done so much harm, I can't imagine how much damage a movie version would have done. To me, the concept of Satan now is more of a way to deflate things than anything. I think a lot of people are very seriously and humorlessly invested in these ideas that a secret cabal controls the world and runs their lives and all this and when you point out to them that surely Satan must be behind it, then they think you're just making fun of them. So I don't think Satan really serves much of a purpose these days. You say it and people feel like you're insulting them, because the notion is so childish that there's an actual personification of evil.

Although Satan has traditionally been portrayed as male, he is associated with a feminine power that usually takes the form of illicit sexuality. Is this association with sexuality an advantage or a disadvantage to Satanism?

GB: I think it's certainly an advantage. Sex is incredibly fundamental and also a fun concept culturally to play with. People are drawn to sexuality in its many different forms. The people who most often fear it are conservative, religious groups. And from that capacity I don't think we're going to be winning any battles with them – we're not going to convince them of the moral quality of having a fulfilling sex life, for example. But in the realm of the Devil, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll are some things that are closely associated.

How relevant is The Satanic Bible to Satanists today?

GB: I think it's still key. I don't think it's the only text – there are other books, fiction and non-fiction, that are relevant. But while you have various offshoots and rivals to the Church of Satan emerging, like the Satan-



In League with Lucifer: The Satanic Temple's controversial Baphomet statue, and (inset) Satanic feminist Jex Blackmore.

ic Temple, they almost all invariably riff off *The Satanic Bible*. So by that measurement you can't challenge its significance. And it does create a

bedrock, an area around which to have the debate. When I discussed it with LaVey, one of the first things I asked him was "Is the *Satanic Bible* still relevant?" And his response was that he went through a period thinking it wasn't relevant anymore, and then he re-read it and decided it was actually more relevant than ever. If it's dated at all, it's because some of the things he said, which seemed a bit out there when he said them, now seem such common sense that why would anyone say it?

So, for example, when he talked about artificial human companions, everyone immediately as-

sumes robots, and if you look at the news that is certainly something that is happening.

Jex, were you happy with the portrayal of Satanism in the *Hail Satan?* documentary?

JB: I think that the *Hail Satan?* documentary ended up being essentially a propaganda piece for the Satanic Temple, which was not how I understood it going in, although I also understand it was an artistic interpretation made by the director. It disappointed me in that there are still thousands of non-theistic Satanists practicing and engaged in satanic activism, for example, who have made a decision to function outside of organizations or who have left the Satanic Temple to do the work. That is much more a movement that is quickly defined by the Satanic Temple, which I don't think necessarily was communicated very well in the film. But it's important that people know and understand that satanic activism is alive and well and something of a new political and social movement, certainly a religious movement as well. And it's my hope that people have a little more understanding of the breadth of contemporary Satanism. And also the film seemed to gloss over the value of ritual

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The Satanic Bible
Anton Szandor LaVey



HORROR HAS HAD A LONG LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE DEVIL,
AND THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW GOOD REASONS WHY

Satan is Reel

BY BENOIT BLACK

SATAN AND HORROR MOVIES. HORROR MOVIES AND SATAN. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP MADE IN HELL THAT HAS SERVED BOTH SIDES EXTREMELY WELL.

One needn't look much further than what is arguably the greatest horror movie of all time (that would be *The Exorcist*) to see the power that is generated when the genre consorts with the Devil. He's been called the ultimate boogeyman and, irrespective of your religious (or non-religious) beliefs, Satan has had a special place in the horror genre from day one. With a name that translates to "adversary," the Devil is less a character of mythology than an archetype, a catch-all for the powers of darkness — from evil and human hatred, to the social taboos of sex and rebellion, but Satan's movies tend to return to several core ideas.

FIRST FRIGHTS

The Devil made his remarkable entrance in cinema at the exact moment when film first began. Georges Méliès, known for his outstanding *A Trip to the Moon* (1908) also experimented with darker arts, notably *Le Manoir du Diable* (*The Devil's Castle*, 1896), which has the distinction of being the world's very first horror movie. Early cinema drew influence from the stories at its disposal, which were all found in literature at the time. Chief among

those was Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, adapted as the silent film *L'Inferno* in 1911, and the notorious *Maleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of the Witches*, a text used for routing out satanic influences, which became the basis for 1922's *Häxan*. In the latter, director Benjamin Christensen also played the role of Satan as a lascivious Pan-like figure whose nighttime ceremonies and rituals undoubtedly elicited shivers among the first audiences to lay eyes on him. The Devil would make another notable appearance in F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926), a loose adaptation of Goethe's classic story and a pinnacle of early German cinema.

THE DEVIL INCARNATE

Satan would really come into his own with the success of British writer Dennis Wheatley, whose novels drew from the occult texts of 18th-century magician Eliphas Levi and the life of occultist Aleister Crowley. Those stories came to life in the spectacular opticals of *The Devil Rides Out* (1968) and *To the Devil... a Daughter* (1976), both of which contributed to the author being considered an authority on Satanism and black magic. *The Devil Rides Out*, in particular, contains scenes of orgiastic dancing and sacrifice prior to the appearance of Satan himself, who resembles Levi's rendition of



Baphomet. Satan would reappear in occult cinema throughout the 1960s, culminating with a sinister offscreen appearance in *Rosemary's Baby*, though the giveaway line of "What have you done to his eyes?" would indicate that director Roman Polanski did not stray far from Levi's vision. Horror movies continued to play with the idea of Satan personified in the decades that follow, exploring him as a gentleman of charm (*Angel Heart*, 1987), a lawyer (*The Devil's Advocate*, 1997), an antique dealer (*Needful Things*, 1993), and an eccentric mortuary owner (*Tales From the Hood*, 1995) though, ironically, offscreen appearances gave the character more weight.

Further viewing: *Night of the Demon* (1957), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), *The Devil's Rain* (1975), *Race With the Devil* (1975), *The Sentinel* (1977), *The Believers* (1987), *The House of the Devil* (2009), *Starry Eyes* (2014), *The Blackcoat's Daughter* (2015), *Pyewacket* (2017), *Hereditary* (2018).

DEMONIC DOMINATION

The Christian mind, it appears, has entertained the richest and most vivid tales about Satan and his influence over the innocent. In the early 1970s, Ken Russell's *The Devils* explored the fragmenting psyche of a nun in the grip of demonic (i.e. sexual) hysteria. A few years later, the Jesuit-schooled William Peter Blatty penned *The Exorcist*, which, when adapted by director William Friedkin, did more for the public's perception of Satan than perhaps any other release. In it, the Devil is revealed to predate ancient Babylonia — a demonic entity whose sole purpose is to attack God by denigrating humanity. His target: a twelve-year-old girl, put through some of the most abominable and blasphemous acts ever imagined.

The Exorcist became the catalyst after which satanic cinema flourished throughout the next decades, mainly in B-movies, though most recently in blockbuster franchises such as *The Conjuring* cycle of films.

Further viewing: *Abby* (1974), *Alucarda* (1977), *Amityville II: The Possession* (1982), *The Exorcist III* (1990), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *Constantine* (2005), *REC* (2007), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *The Last Exorcism* (2010), *The Wailing* (2016), *Veronica* (2017).

AGENT OF THE APOCALYPSE

An era of satanic panic was ushered in with the 1980s (see p.64) stoked by beliefs about the End Times as told in the biblical book of Revelations.

This idea took root in *The Omen* trilogy, which began in 1976 and continued through two sequels that charted the birth and rise of the Devil's own son, the Antichrist, on the world stage.

The Prophecy (1995) made a franchise out of the war between the forces of good and evil well into the new millennium, when fear of the End Times petered out. Post-millennium horror movies tended for a less literal and more psychological approach, as seen in *Frailty* (2001) and *The Sacrament* (2013), which explore a religious End of Days scenario from the perspective of a small group of believers. The theme had a recent resurgence in the unlikely form of Robert Egger's 2015 folk horror tale *The Witch*, where a biblical End Times narrative is transposed to a single New England family circa 1630, complete with Devil in the form of a black goat.

Further viewing: *Prince of Darkness* (1987), *Stigmata* (1999), *End of Days* (1999), *The Ninth Gate* (1999), *Legion* (2010), *Deliver Us From Evil* (2014), *Deathgasm* (2015), *Mandy* (2018).

A NEW DAWN

The latest in satanic cinema comes in the form of the cursed film, such as *Antrum: The Deadliest Film Ever Made* and *Fury of the Demon*, both released this year. The films start from the same premise — a movie that is able to bring about the death of whoever views it. But whereas *Fury of the Demon* spends its running time creating a mythology around said movie, *Antrum* cuts to the chase and shows it. Ostensibly a lost film, *Antrum* tells the tale of a little boy who, following the death of his dog, is gripped with the idea that its soul has gone to Hell. His older sister takes it upon herself to comfort her brother by taking him into the woods to partake in a ritual... only to make matters much worse. Intercut throughout the movie-within-a-movie are occult sigils, unsettling footage of demons close-up and snippets of what appears to be a snuff video. Filmmakers David Amato and Michael Laicini maintain that *Antrum* was shot sometime in the late 1970s and acquired by their Else Films film production company in 2014. Much like the cursed film in *Fury of the Demon*, they profess that *Antrum* has a "history of triggering emotional duress and provoking physical or psychological danger."

Whether the Devil does indeed dwell within the frames of *Antrum* or *Fury of the Demon* will ultimately be for audiences to determine, but one thing is for sure: a new satanic age of cinema may have just begun. 🐐



The Devil's Legacy: (above) *Antrum: The Deadliest Film Ever Made*, and (opposite, from top) *Faust*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Omen*.

and the power of ritual which has been employed by many practicing Satanists, and that does a disservice to the value of ritual practice within the satanic structure.

What does Satan mean to you now?

GH: You know, I like the guy! He's got such a shitty job, no one actually wants to be in Hell and he's got to manage it... what a drag. I feel like, depending on what your beliefs are, maybe Hell is full of Hindus, which actually sounds kind of fun. They've probably got some great Bollywood movies and the food's great. Maybe it's all full of Jews. Well, great, sign me up, that sounds cool. I think physically, my Hell is Dante's *Inferno* Hell, you know, the Nine Circles, the Malebolge and stuff but, mentally, I feel like the atmosphere's more like a giant poorly managed company without enough resources and with a flustered CEO where everything bottlenecks with him or her. Spiritually, my idea of Hell is probably eternal boredom, interspersed with deep bouts of frustration. So that's my image of Hell. But anytime you push a metaphorical concept to the point where it's taken literally, it always gets kind of ridiculous and goofy.

Do you have a favourite representation of Satan in horror?

GB: *Bedazzled* is an obvious one. And I've been on a big Paul Naschy film kick recently, and I'd certainly say [1979's] *El Caminante* [a.k.a. *The Traveller*], that's sensational. And that's kind of a folkloric devil – sort of religious but also has a medieval feel, which I like. And if I was to choose one more it would be *Häxan*; the Devil in that is extraordinary. There's a great scene where the Devil comes upon a nun in the pulpit and you think he's going to seduce her with honeyed words, but instead he pulls out a big fuck-off club and knocks her on the head.

What is the future of Satanism?

JB: I hope it is a growing movement and that more people engage with the concept of Satan as a liberator and as a spiritual framework that people find useful and powerful. I think that is tending to be the case, especially if we continue to have the rise of the conservative religious right dominating the narrative about what is appropriate and what is good.

GB: The problem with the Satanic Temple is that it's pinning Satanism down in a way which isn't helpful or honest I don't think. Because while some of the things they say may chime with my personal ethical position on various political issues, that's not the satanic position. So Satanism isn't pro- or anti-abortion for example; that isn't really an appropriate vehicle. I've seen unapologetic uses of 'Satanic Justice Warrior' in a positive sense, and trying to turn the Devil into the good guy just goes against the grain. It's the same with witchcraft. A lot of the appeal of the



Forbidden Fruit: In his most mainstream incarnations, Satan appears as a scantly-clad seductress, as in the movie *Bedazzled*, and (inset) Gavin Baddeley.

"THE DEVIL HAS BEEN WITH US FOR HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF YEARS, AND DEVIL FILMS HAVE GONE IN AND OUT OF FASHION AND WILL DO SO AGAIN. BUT THE ARCHETYPE ITSELF, THE THING IT REPRESENTS, IS A CONSTANT IN WESTERN CIVILIZATIONS."

Gavin Baddeley

archetype of the witch, which is seductive but sinister; there's something dangerous about it. And you have all these people who are drawn to this idea. The minute they get on board they want to take over and say, 'Well, actually, witches are nice.' And it's like, 'Why did you come here in the first place?' And so I think the whole idea of Satanism, I think the mischief of it I approve of, but I think the idea of creating this progressive, left-leaning political entity is totally wrongheaded. But as a private thing, the Devil has been with

us for hundreds and hundreds of years, and Devil films have gone in and out of fashion and will do so again. But the archetype itself, the thing it represents, is a constant in Western civilizations. As long as you have Abrahamic religions alive and kicking then this anti-religion, which is largely born of the Enlightenment, is both necessary and inevitable. The future of Satanism, to a certain extent, I don't care, it can look after itself. But at the moment I think it's something that's still important to me. I find it entertaining and intellectually stimulating.

If he existed, would you like to meet Satan? And what would say to him?

JB: [long pause] I've never been asked this question, which is really interesting. I'm surprised I've never been asked this question before. It's hard for me to think of Satan as anything else but who we are ourselves. It's a really challenging thing. I would be surprised to learn that Satan was male. The gender depiction of the Devil and God is really interesting to me. If Satan was real I'd want to go to a Judas Priest concert with him.

GB: That's a difficult one to answer because I don't believe in Satan, but I think I may have met him, I don't know! My personal opinion is I think I'd say, "Would you like to go for a pint?"

RUE MORGUE LISTS SOME OF THE TOP MOMENTS IN MUSIC HISTORY WHEN LUCIFER GOT LOUD

Songs to Satan

BY AARON VON LUPTON

1713 VIOLIN SONATA IN G MINOR

As legend has it, one night in 1713, Giuseppe Tartini had a dream in which he sold his soul to the Devil. In return, Old Scratch taught the Italian composer what would become his best-known composition, a sonata written for violin with bass accompaniment in four movements which he famously named the "Devil's Trill." His story gave birth to countless legends of deals with the Devil in return for musical fame and fortune.

1903 POPE PIUS X BANS THE SAXOPHONE

Back in 1903, Pope Pius X took it upon himself to outline what instruments could be played in the Church. He banned the saxophone, claiming that it sounded like the work of the Devil. That ban has never been officially lifted.

1938 ROBERT JOHNSON'S DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

Though facts surrounding the life of Mississippi blues musician Robert Johnson are unreliable, one thing historians agree on is that his late-'30s recordings are some of the most influential in music history. A famous legend arose that Johnson, seeking fame, was instructed to take his guitar to the crossroad at midnight. There, a large black man took his guitar, tuned it, played a few songs and handed it back. The rest, as they say, is history.

1968 SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

The Rolling Stones were already every parent's headache when they recorded this track for their 1968 album *Beggars Banquet*. In it, singer/songwriter Mick Jagger personifies Satan, claiming responsibility for certain violent historical events. "Sympathy for the Devil" became one of the first "satanic" anthems, and has been covered by innumerable artists.

1973 "HERE'S TO MY SWEET SATAN"

Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page fell in love with the occult after reading Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice* as a teenager. Such was his obsession that he took his defining "Zoso" symbol (on *Led Zeppelin IV*) from an old alchemical grimoire, launched an occult bookshop and publishing house, and even purchased Crowley's former residence on the shores of Loch Ness. The Parents Music Resource Center later claimed that Zepp's music contained satanic messages when played backwards, notably the line from "Stairway To Heaven": "If there's a bustle in your hedgerow, don't be alarmed now..." which, in reverse, sounds like "Here's to my sweet Satan..."

1970 BLACK SABBATH AND THE DEVIL'S INTERVAL

Rock 'n' roll changed forever on Friday the 13th of February 1970, when Black Sabbath released their self-titled debut album. Featuring an inverted cross on the inside of the gatefold LP and an opening track that details a confrontation with Satan, the long-standing association between heavy metal and the Devil was born. It's notable that the song makes use of the tritone, which is an interval that goes across three tones, branded "Diabolus in Musica" or "The Devil's Interval" since the 18th century.

1981 VENOM

UK-based Venom wholeheartedly embraced their image of long-haired Satan-worshipping maniacs, particularly on their first two albums. *Welcome to Hell* (1981) displayed a goat-horned devil and pentagram on the front cover, and *Black Metal* (1982) doubled down on that imagery and subject matter, giving the name to the satanic music genre that would emerge ten years later.

1982 THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

British heavy metal band Iron Maiden didn't pull any punches on 1982's *The Number of the Beast*, with striking Derek Riggs artwork depicting band mascot Eddie controlling the Devil like a marionette, while Satan commanded a smaller version of Eddie. The album became an immediate target for Christians, who organized public record smashings, while the corresponding tour was subject to protests and picketing.

1985 HELL AWAITS

In the late '70s, the religious right began making claims that rock bands were hiding satanic messages on their records. Enter Slayer who, on their second studio album *Hell Awaits*, recorded backwards the phrase "Join us" 45 times followed by "Welcome back!" before ripping into the title track – an over-the-top satanic fantasy in which the Devil's legions take aim at God and the Gates of Hell are opened.

1990-1993 NORWEGIAN BLACK METAL

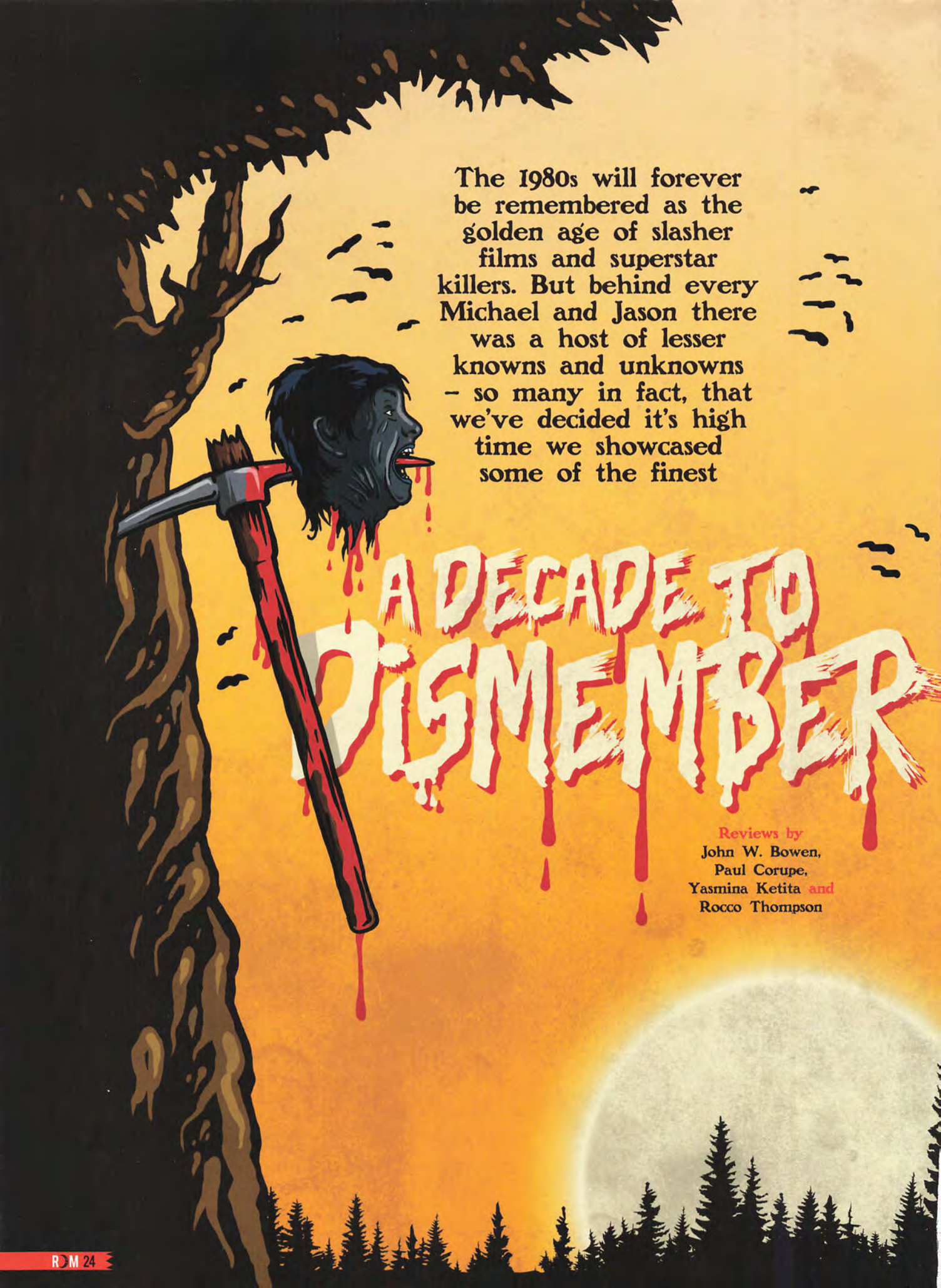
Venom considered their satanic antics mere publicity stunts, but not their metal brethren in Burzum, Dark Throne, Emperor, and Mayhem. These misanthropic young Scandinavian acts took up the mantle of Black Metal and created something far darker and more dangerous, eventually leading some of them to burn down 12th-century churches and murder fellow band members.

1995 SNOOP DOGG AND MEPHISTOPHELES

Most people think of rock and metal bands as the music that sold its soul for fame and money, but hip hop artists have gotten in on the act as well. In his autobiography, *The Doggfather*, Snoop Dogg claims he made such a deal. Snoop also based his 1995 short film and soundtrack album *Murder Was the Case* on his relationship with Mephistopheles. *Murder* sees the rapper die and be resurrected following a deal with the Devil.

2010 GHOST

While the image of lead vocalist Papa Emeritus (Tobias Forge) as a satanic Pope in corpse paint screamed extreme metal in 2010, the band's sound hearkened back to the psychedelic days of '70s rock, when popular music first began cavorting with the occult. The satanic messaging was on-the-nose and Ghost would continue to explore this theme over the course of its discography. Forty years after Black Sabbath was considered dangerous, Ghost's devil-worshipping act was showcased on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in October 2015, proving that America had welcomed the Devil into mainstream culture.

A horror-themed illustration. On the left, a large, gnarled tree trunk is visible. A severed head with dark hair and a wide-eyed, screaming expression is impaled on a pickaxe. The pickaxe is positioned diagonally, with the head of the pickaxe at the top left and the handle extending towards the bottom center. Blood is dripping from the head and the handle. The background is a bright orange-yellow sky with a large, pale full moon in the bottom right corner. Silhouettes of evergreen trees are visible along the bottom edge. Several small, dark, bird-like shapes are scattered in the sky.

The 1980s will forever be remembered as the golden age of slasher films and superstar killers. But behind every Michael and Jason there was a host of lesser knowns and unknowns – so many in fact, that we've decided it's high time we showcased some of the finest

A DECADE TO DISMEMBER

Reviews by
John W. Bowen,
Paul Corupe,
Yasmina Ketita and
Rocco Thompson

TERROR TRAIN

This was the last of three horror films starring Jamie Lee Curtis to be released in under eight months in 1980, but remains the dark horse of the triptych; perhaps because it involves neither John Carpenter nor a non-ironically disco-dancing Leslie Nielsen. Three years after a fraternity prank lands a young misfit (Derek McKinnon) in a mental hospital, he dons various disguises to exact revenge while his tormentors party on an old-fashioned excursion train. The usual '80s slasher film "problems" – i.e. improbable plotting and lame dialogue – are alleviated here by director Roger Spottiswoode's instinct for maximizing a uniquely claustrophobic setting, painted in rich, dark hues by Oscar-winning cinematographer John Alcott (*The Shining*, *A Clockwork Orange*). As usual, Curtis makes for a sexy and genuinely likeable heroine, but it's aging icon Ben Johnson who really classes up the joint as the gruff but affable train conductor. Not quite a milestone, but essential viewing for any serious slasher fan. **JWB**



concerned when some of her snobbish friends go missing, especially since she thinks she might be killing them off herself during episodes of amnesia. Directed with a sure hand by veteran J. Lee Thompson, the memorable murder sequences all lead up to a shocking – if confusing – final twist that is just the icing on the cake. **PC**

DON'T GO IN THE WOODS



A rough and tumble backwoods charmer that inexplicably landed on the UK's infamous "video nasty" list, this Rockies-shot slasher features Herschell Gordon Lewis Red™ blood, a gloriously unrefined soundscape suggestive of a billiard ball abusing a Casio wristwatch, and a cast of nobodies struggling (and losing) against the worst dubbing outside of a Kung Fu import. In spite of – or perhaps because of – these shortcomings, *Don't Go in the Woods* is a bloodsoaked romp that demands to be seen in a room full of inebriated genre fans. It would make a fine double-feature with the similar yet far more sober-minded *Just Before Dawn* (1981). **RT**



FADE TO BLACK

Whether you're a social outcast or a horror addict (or both), you'll be able to relate to Eric Binford (Dennis Christopher) in *Fade To Black*; or at least feel some pity for him when he's berated for his desire to live in his favourite films. Binford's obsession with movies and a girl who looks like Marilyn Monroe push him over the edge into madness as he embarks on a killing spree dressed as his favourite onscreen characters. Commercially unsuccessful upon its release, *Fade to Black*'s eventual cult following undoubtedly fell for its gratuitous violence and iconic classic VHS cover art. **YK**



THE BURNING

Although *The Burning*'s plot – a horribly disfigured maniac runs amok at summer camp – is painfully rote, the film enjoys standout status for its superior execution. The cast is surprisingly strong, including Brian Backer (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*), *Seinfeld*'s Jason Alexander (with hair!), and, in a bit part, Holly Hunter. Ranking among gore effects king Tom Savini's best early work (he famously passed on *Friday the 13th Part 2* for it), *The Burning* sports some inspired murders, including the now-infamous raft scene in which killer Cropsy (Lou David) takes out five (five!) campers in one go, armed only with his trusty garden shears. Some quality nudity on offer here too! **JWB**



BLOODY BIRTHDAY



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME

If your familiarity with this Canadian slasher ends at posting its memorable "killer shish kabob" poster to friends' Facebook pages on their birthdays, it's time to fix that. High school student Virginia (Melissa Sue Anderson) is

Director Ed Hunt's only entry in the slasher sweepstakes is a real gift-wrapped surprise; an unsettling depiction of kids turned into ruthless killers. *Bloody Birthday*'s trio of preteen terrors Curtis (Billy Jacoby), Debbie (Elizabeth Hoy) and Steven (Andy Freeman) are chillingly detached throughout the film as they dispatch anyone who crosses them, from dismissive siblings to neighbourhood bullies. Consciously violating

film taboos in which children are both the victims and perpetrators of deadly violence, *Bloody Birthday* gets under your skin by having typical child games like hide 'n' seek or casual teasing turn suddenly (and usually inexplicably) deadly. A must-see for anyone who has kids, or was once one themselves. **PC**

THE PROWLER

Residing in the same Forbidden Dance file as *My Bloody Valentine* and, uh... *Footloose*, *The Prowler* opens with a flashback to a double murder committed by a jilted lover during a small town spring dance in 1945. The party is cancelled for another 35 years, but then the ban is lifted and... well, guess what happens? Helmed by Joseph Zito, who would go on to direct *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (1984) and the Chuck Norris hits *Missing in Action* (1984) and *Invasion U.S.A.* (1985), *The Prowler* nonetheless remains best known as another early '80s showcase for some of Tom Savini's most audacious gore effects, including an astounding (if ever-so-slightly-improbable) bayonet-through-skull gag and a cranial shotgun blast that almost rivals the one in *Maniac* (1980). **JWB**



GRADUATION DAY

Even while slavishly following a laundry list of slasher tropes, *Graduation Day* achieves its own special brand of batshit crazy, thanks largely to the directorial talents of folk-singer-turned-filmmaker (and future rabbi!) Herb Freed, who stirs shit up with twice the panache and self-assurance of most of his peers. Never mind an overabundance of red herrings and a painfully self-conscious Hitchcockian climax, Freed keeps the pace brisk and never skimps on the gore. Rounded out with '80s B-royalty including Christopher George, Linnea Quigley, Michael Pataki and – the rumours are true! – pre-*Wheel of Fortune* Vanna White. **JWB**



VISITING HOURS



Shot under the eerie fluorescent lighting of a Montreal hospital, *Visiting Hours* is a well-constructed cat-and-mouse slasher that features Michael Ironside as Colt, a misogynist creep and killer obsessed with silencing an outspoken feminist journalist (Lee Grant). When an early knife attack sees his surviving victim taken away in an ambulance, Colt rolls his arm around in glass shards to get into the ER and finish the job. Buoyed by a relentless performance by Ironside, *Visiting Hours* boasts an unseemly, voyeuristic feel that helped land it on the UK's "video nasty" list. Plus, the plot remains surprisingly relevant more than 35 years later. **PC**



PIECES



"Bastard! Bastaaaarrrd!" Is it so appallingly bad it's good? Or is it a sly satire on slasher films that are so appallingly bad they're good? Both? Who cares? The only thing more plentiful than the gratuitous violence and nudity in this berserk Spanish/American college campus splatter opera is the overwrought script's endless stream of non-sequiturs and butt-clenching hyperbole. It all combines to set *Pieces* neither above nor below but simply beyond its peers. Best viewed with your most sarcastic friends and a large supply of alcohol and drugs. (Or so we've heard.) **JWB**

ALONE IN THE DARK



Everyone is crazy – even the good guys. That mindset is essential to the full enjoyment of *Alone in the Dark*, Jack Sholder's brutal and unapologetically eccentric thriller that exists out on the periphery of the slasher subgenre, yet sports enough of the usual tropes to warrant inclusion here. Shortly after starting a new job at an experimental asylum where the staff are as bonkers as the inmates, a psychiatrist (*The A-Team*'s Dwight Schultz) and his oddball family are terrorized by four escaped patients who are

convinced he got the job by murdering their favourite doctor. Co-starring Donald Pleasence, Jack Palance, Martin Landau and Erland van Lidth – sold yet? **JWB**

HOSPITAL MASSACRE



Hospital Massacre (a.k.a. *X-Ray*, *Ward 13* and *Be My Valentine... or Else*) is a truly terrifying entry in the slasher canon, particularly if you have an existing distaste for hospitals. In it, jilted psychopath Harold (Charles Lucia) stalks his former teenage crush Susan ('80s *Playboy* playmate Barbi Benton) in a hospital, all the while offing doctors and nurses who cross his path. The circumstances of the film are implausible, sure, but it's all part of its charm – the oddball cheese factor is offset nicely by the

hospital's menacing ambiance as Harold's victims pile up. Sucks to be Susan, but good to be a horror fan watching *Hospital Massacre*! **YK**



stars Rankin/Bass's own Frosty the Snowman – Jackie Vernon – as a construction worker who develops a taste for electromagnetically irradiated female flesh after microwaving his nag of a wife. Essentially 76-minutes of one-liners, the performanc-

es are what you'd find just a few exits past John Waters' Baltimore, making *Microwave Massacre* a deadpan, ruefully humorous cannibal comedy reminiscent of Paul Bartel's *Eating Raoul* (1982), minus any art house pretense. **RT**

CURTAINS



An old dark mansion, a creepy doll and a killer in a disturbing hag mask all feature prominently in this exceptional whodunit slasher that makes full use of its icy Canadian winter setting. *Curtains* stars John Vernon as an enigmatic film director who invites six different actresses to his secluded estate to audition for a prized role in his latest film. As you might expect, a series of bloody and violent deaths casts suspicion on the girls, the house servants, and even the veteran actress (Samantha Eggar) who was first promised the part before she was committed to a mental institution. Very little is as it seems in this purpose-

fully stagey, *giallo*-influenced production that emphasizes the artifice of the genre. Bolstered by a memorable ice rink death in which the masked killer on skates attacks a figure skater with a sickle, *Curtains'* individual set pieces are ultimately more interesting than the overall work, but it isn't easily forgotten – even after the velvet drapes draw to a close. **PC**



1983

SLEDGEHAMMER



David A. Prior, the mastermind behind 1987's *Deadly Prey*, busted out the big guns in his 1983 directorial debut, *Sledgehammer*. After a young boy murders his mother and her lover mid-coitus, we flash forward to ten years later, where a group of suspiciously old-looking teenagers spend a weekend getaway avoiding getting murdered by a masked, raving maniac wielding a – you guessed it – sledgehammer. Shot on camcorder and plagued by gratuitous slow motion (if they sped up all the slo-mo to regular speed, *Sledgehammer* would be

half as long), it's nonetheless a delightfully simple 90-minute slasher party with food fights, deep conversations and... a séance. Need we say more?

YK

MICROWAVE MASSACRE

Absolutely everything you need to know about *Microwave Massacre* is delivered in its opening shot, in which the film's title is slapped across a pair of bouncing breasts. This broad, horny-minded slasher send-up

1984

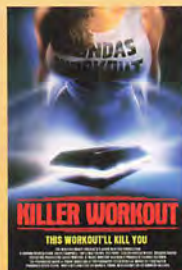
ROCKTOBER BLOOD

In a classic fusion of horror mayhem and '80s heavy metal, *Rocktober Blood* follows Billy (Tray Loren), a murderous metal vocalist who returns from the dead after being executed to pick off the members of his former band and stalk his ex-girlfriend (Donna Scoggins) who turned him in. Billy's death mask is iconic, as is the movie's soundtrack by the LA-based metal band Sorcery. In one memorable (if not coherent) scene where Billy's grave is unearthed, we behold his remains as both a decrepit zombie and as a perfectly bleached skull. At any rate, Billy is most certainly back in *Rocktober Blood*... aaaaahhh aaaaahhh aaaaaahhh! **YK**



THE MUTILATOR

Alcoholic, macho, abusive, trophy-hunting psycho blames his son for his wife's accidental death (granted, it actually was the little shit's fault) and goes on killing spree years later; *The Mutilator* is a parade of atrocious acting, worse writing, horrendous faux-Billy Joel songs and guys with sweaters tied around their shoulders — but, guess what, kids? At the 1:11:00 mark it all becomes tolerable, because there's a murder scene so insane, gruesome and colossally tasteless, you'd swear this American movie suddenly took out Italian citizenship! Careful you don't sprain your rewind button finger when the big moment comes. **JWB**



owned by fitness guru Rhonda (Marcia Karr) that seem to be related to her twin sister's death-by-tanning-bed years earlier. Made by David A. Prior, the madman behind SOV slasher classic *Sledgehammer* (1983), *Killer Workout* is a frothy but fun effort that promises to only strain your sense of credulity. **PC**

SLAUGHTER HIGH



Prolific producer Dick Randall was behind many of the sleaziest films of the 1970s and '80s, including trashy horror entries *Pieces* (1981) and *Don't Open till Christmas* (1984). While *Slaughter High* never reaches the same levels of sleaze as those works, it's still a solid slasher involving the perpetrators of cruel high school April Fools' Day pranks whose ten-year reunion is spoiled by a mystery murderer in a jester mask. Chock-full of unpleasantness, including death by acid-laced beer and tractor (yes, really), it's a remedial course in the slasher basics, but one that eventually passes with flying colours (and the occasional javelin). **PC**



1985/86

BLOOD CULT and REVENGE

Holding the esteemed title as the first direct-to-video movie ever made, Christopher Lewis' *Blood Cult* and its sequel, *Revenge*, may have gone undetected by slasher buffs who neglected their history homework. Shot on shoestring budgets a year apart, both films involve a satanic cult that collects the body parts of high school students to be used in ritual sacrifices. It's admittedly a cut for those slasher fans whose tastes run to the amateur end of the spectrum, but the kills are gruesome and plentiful and a standout hot tub conversation scene in *Revenge* is worth sacrificing a limb or two! **YK**

KILLER WORKOUT

Ever try to wash blood out of a bright pink and green leotard? Released at the height of the '80s health fad, *Killer Workout* — also known as *Aerobicide* — confirms that sneaking suspicion that the gym equipment may secretly be trying to kill us. This spandex-laden thriller sees hard bodies pile up at a new gym

1987

PROM NIGHT II



Thirty years after high school hellcat Mary Lou Maloney becomes the victim of a *Carrie*-style prank gone awry, her spirit returns to raise holy terror in this "sequel" to 1980's *Prom Night* which was originally intended as a standalone effort (titled *Hello Mary Lou*) before being rechristened to capitalize on

We've all heard about the "rules" of slasher movies, but are they accurate?

SLASHERS FOR DUMMIES

by John W. Bowen



“Number One: You can never have sex. Number Two: You can never drink or do drugs. And Number Three: never, ever, ever under any circumstances say, ‘I’ll be right back.’ Because you won’t.”

— Randy (Jamie Kennedy) in *Scream* (1996)

Call it the slasher film’s answer to “I before E except after C,” an adage with so many real-life exceptions that it barely qualifies as a generality, never mind a rule. Granted, there’s plenty of cinematic precedent to back up Randy’s little dictum, which seemingly overnight entered every cult film fan’s lexicon, but it’s not mere small-minded pedantry to point out a number of glaring deviations – in some of the slasher subgenre’s most iconic titles – that call these “rules” into question. Well, at least the ones about sex, booze and drugs; debunking “I’ll be right back” is a whole other column. (Achtung, babies! Multiple spoilers lurk ahead!) (Like, duh.)

BLACK CHRISTMAS (1974) – At the very least, you’d think the film widely regarded as this subgenre’s granddaddy would be built around a heroine who embodied antiquated notions of female virtue, right? Well, meet Jess (Olivia Hussey). She’s perhaps a bit humourless and straight-laced compared to some of her sorority sisters (*cough*...Margot Kidder’s Barb...*cough*), but before the first act’s over we learn she’s not only a) sexually active, but also b) knocked up and c) steadfast in her determination to abort the aforementioned knocked-up-ness, which means d) directly disobeying the demands of her dinosaur dickhead boyfriend (Kier Dullea). Theoretically, our girl’s cruisin’ for contusions, but it’s not to be.

HALLOWEEN (1978) – Final Girl nonpareil Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) may be a bookish virgin but at the 31-minute mark we learn she has no qualms about smoking weed... and en route to her babysitting gig, no less (can you say, “child endangerment”?!). Meanwhile, “Don’t Fear the Reaper” plays portentously on the car radio. Bad Final Girl! Bad!

FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980) – Okay, two couples do in fact get offed for boinking in this one and, in the second instance, smoking a postcoital joint. But what of our heroine? We might assume Alice (Adri-

enne King) is a virgin on the (shaky) grounds that she doesn’t have sex with the guy she’s crushing on (Peter Brouwer), but who’s to say he wouldn’t have scored if he’d stayed alive long enough to even attempt a hookup? Our Alice also drinks beer and plays strip *Monopoly*, although the game is called on account of bad weather (!?) before any significant exposure happens.

FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2 (1981) – Final Girl Ginny (Amy Steel) is loudly, proudly sexually active and enjoys a few beers to boot, but there’s a loophole, or at least the filmmakers would have us think: Ginny begs off having sex during the film’s run time because she’s got her period. So, we’re to conclude she’s temporarily virtuous enough to survive the killing spree just because it’s Shark Week? Bitch, please.

THE BURNING (1981) – Much (okay, not that much, but a bit) has been made of this film’s eschewing of the usual Final Girl in favour of the seldom-seen Final Boy, but bully-magnet Alfred (*Fast Times At Ridgemont High*’s Brian Backer) doesn’t exactly embrace abstinence for its own sake; he’s a skeezy, twitchy little outcast and part-time Peeping Tom who has little hope of ever losing his virginity without a cash transaction. *The Burning*’s sexual politics get even murkier when Karen (Carolyn Houlihan) goes skinny dipping, then spurns the demands of the creepy dude (Ned Eisenberg) who wants her to give it up in the middle of the lake and then... *she gets killed anyway!* And let’s not even get all meta about this film being Harvey Weinstein’s first official credit (as writer/producer).

ALSO NOTABLE: *Terror Train* (1981), in which Jamie Lee Curtis plays the sexually liberated, sardonic-but-sweet-natured early-twentysomething we all hoped Laurie Strode would grow into, and Canadian cult fave *My Bloody Valentine* (1981), which punishes fornicating secondary characters of both sexes in classic fashion but leaves its two-timing heroine unscathed. By no means does the list end there, but my word count does. 🍷

that film's success. Packed with homages to popular horror franchises and directors, *Prom Night II*'s genre literacy went largely unnoticed at the time of release (though the LA Times called it "the *Blue Velvet* of high school horror pictures"), likely because it was treated the way it was marketed: as an unnecessary sequel to a so-so slasher. Thankfully, Mary Lou's cult has grown strong with time, and the film's stunningly surreal set pieces, bold practical effects, and skewering of moralism has aged as nicely as a cyanide-spiked punch. *Prom Night II* is primed to shake, rattle and roll back from the grave – hold onto your cummerbunds, boys! **RT**



TWISTED NIGHTMARE

Twisted Nightmare can be likened to the lovechild of *Friday the 13* and *The Burning*, but with a much lower budget. A group of "teenagers" win a weekend getaway to the summer camp they once attended as children, where they start getting killed off one by one. My two favourite characters are the guy who packs his car with every piece of machinery and weapon imaginable, and the asshole who's more likely to be a murderer than the actual murderer in the movie. The kills are fun and you can't go wrong with dudes playing football in crop tops and short shorts! **YK**



BLOOD DINER

The sardonic spirit of Herschell Gordon Lewis lives on in *Blood Diner*, a gore-splattered slasher comedy from director Jackie Kong. A vegetarian restaurant owned by two bumbling siblings (Rick Burks and Carl Crew) becomes a slaughterhouse when the pair tries to resurrect an ancient cannibalistic goddess. It's a plan concocted by their dead uncle (Drew Godderis), who exists only as a brain in a jar, in one of the film's many gags. Originally conceived as a sequel to Lewis' 1963 classic *Blood Feast*, *Blood Diner* is the kind of film that might have been praised for having its tongue firmly in its cheek, if only it hadn't chopped it off first. **PC**



1988

OUT OF THE DARK



One of the 1980s' weirdest attempts to spice up a slasher storyline with gallows humour, *Out of the Dark* is a sometimes-gripping effort that has somehow remained in the shadows. The story centres on Bobo, a clown-mask wearing psycho terrorizing the female employees at a phone sex

hotline – a familiar plot, but notable in its anticipation of the '90s erotic thriller trend and a cast to die for. Aside from Bud Cort and Karen Black, keep your eyes peeled for gay icon Tab Hunter, *Eating Raoul*'s Paul Bartel as a perverted motel owner, and John Waters regular Divine as the detective trying to shine a light on the killer's identity. **PC**

555



Beloved cult film *555* is an entertaining so-bad-it's-good movie that has gone on to become a rare and expensive treasure on VHS. The film follows a pair of detectives on the hunt for a blade-wielding serial killer dressed as a hippie who likes to murder sexually active teenagers before desecrating their corpses in most unsavoury fashion. A standout scene involves an incredibly vivid decapitation, which later became the cover art for the movie. Props are also due for the attention to detail


in the set design – it's clear from the foam green walls that the crew re-used the same room for every scene! **YK**

EDGE OF THE AXE



Spanish/American TV movie *Edge of the Axe* merits recognition in the slasher realm for its sheer brutality: a masked killer is turning small-town California residents into "hamburger meat" (to quote a cop) with an axe. More stylish than the average slash-and-hack, *Edge of the Axe* boasts ghastly carnage thanks to a top-notch special effects team.

Not only does this underrated gem by *Symptoms* director José Ramón Larraz (credited here as Joseph Braunstein) warrant a watch for its surprise twists and turns, you might find yourself picking up some rad '80s terminology (i.e. "bodacious tatas"). **YK**



A decade before their golden age, slashers defined – and just as often defied – common horror conventions

SLASHING THROUGH THE '70s

by Paul Corupe

Almost every 1980s slasher horror film has a scene just like it – where the young protagonists uncover a buried secret that helps explain why an evil unstoppable killer has been stalking them. Slashers have always featured stories that emphasize the way our present is shaped by our past, and the evolution of the sub-genre itself is similarly indebted to the earlier horror entries. By the VHS era, directors such as Wes Craven and Sean S. Cunningham seemingly perfected a distinctive formula of elaborate death scenes and shadowy killers, but they owe their success to the scrappier slashers of the 1970s that gave life to many of the subgenre's most defining tropes – as well as a few that aren't as widely discussed.

Of course, the tendrils of the 1980s slasher boom reach much further back – long-established elements like final girls, elaborate deaths and masked murderers hearken back to everything from works by Florida exploitation kingpin H.G. Lewis to the UK's Pete Walker; from Italian *giallo* cinema to *Old Dark House* classics. Films such as *Peeping Tom* (1960) and *Psycho* (1960) are often cited as important predecessors to the movement, while some critics have traced the starting point even further back to whodunits, including *And Then There Were None* (1945) and *Thirteen Women* (1932).

It was in the 1970s, however, that gore, sex, voyeurism and high body-count horror seemed to crystallize into something new, thanks to movies like *A Bay of Blood* (1971), *Black Christmas* (1974), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Alice, Sweet Alice* (1976), among others. While John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) cemented many of the subgenre's nascent conventions and launched a wave of copycats, many of the North American '70s slashers were regional films that came and went in relative obscurity, but were no less important in establishing some of the less obvious aspects of the slasher horror recipe.

The early part of the decade, for example, saw a string of features that bridged the psychological focus of '60s horror with the bloodsoaked slashers to come. Movies like *Sweet Kill* (1972), *I Dismember Mama* (1972), *Scream Bloody Murder* (1973) and *The Witch Who Came From the Sea* (1976) all featured killers consumed by intense Oedipal complexes. The

1980s slashers that portrayed their murderers as making deadly moral judgements on premarital sex likely drew influence from these discomfiting psychosexual films that drew a clear link between sexual pathology and violent death.

In fact, mother obsessions also appeared prominently in '70s films that uniquely positioned the killer as disturbed but ultimately sympathetic. In *Deranged* (1974), naïve backwoods killer Ezra Cobb dotes over his mama's corpse, while *Don't Go in the House* (1979) has a flamethrower-wielding wallflower who never got over being burned as punishment by dear ol' mom. And then there's *The Love Butcher* (1975), in which a disabled gardener struggles to contain his other self – a secondary sex-obsessed personality that likes to kill. *Psychic Killer* (1975) and *Axe* (1974) also feature slightly deranged killers that viewers can't help but root for in some way, which helped give Freddy and Jason a hip, anti-hero sheen as they sliced and diced annoying teens.

There were other influences, too. Whether campground, hospital, carnival funhouse or dream-world boiler room, the very specific public sites where many 1980s slashers took place also owe their pedigree to the pioneering work of 1970s horror directors. Given that many genre films at the time were cash-strapped regional productions that sought to exploit local amenities, the decade's slasher films often featured limited settings like schools (1973's *Horror High*, 1976's *Massacre at Central High* and *The Redeemer: Son of Satan*), drive-in theatres (1976's *Drive In Massacre*, 1977's *Ruby*), or tourist attractions (the hotels in 1976's *Eaten Alive* or the museum in 1979's *Tourist Trap*) as inescapable locations for killers to ensnare their prey.

Twenty years later, *Scream* (1996) was able to clearly set out the "rules" for surviving a horror film based on observations from more than a decade of fright film franchises. And while slasher fans often prefer those 1980s films for the way they offered subtle variations on an established formula, the 1970s proto-slashers are more unpredictable and eclectic in their approach, unencumbered by many of the tropes that, by *Scream*, had become clichés. But that's not too surprising, is it? After all, you can't play by the rules when you're too busy writing them. 📖

CHEERLEADER CAMP

Summer camp slashers are a dime a dozen, but *themed* summer camp slashers are worth their weight in cheese. Case in point: this kill-fest about a cheerleading captain (Betsy Russell) plagued by disturbing, pom-pom-festooned dreams that may or may not be connected to the bloody deaths of her squadmates. Featuring supporting turns by Leif Garrett and bad movie royalty, Lucinda Dickey (*Ninja III: The Domination*), *Cheerleader Camp* makes good on the promise of its legendary VHS box art with mascot dance-offs, teen sex-comedy laffs, a revolting white guy rap number, and an ending that'll knock your spanky pants clean off. **RT**



HIDE AND GO SHRIEK

When eight freshly minted high school graduates gather for a night of beer and boning in a shuttered furniture store, they find themselves at the mercy of a lurking menace with an affinity for playing dress-up with their cast-off garments in TV producer Skip Schoolnik's directorial debut. With some truly intense death scenes and enough creepy mannequins to make Joe Spinell uneasy, *Hide and Go Shriek* is an effective thriller in the



vein of *The Initiation* or *Chopping Mall* — other slashers about teens getting up to no good in places of business. Equating homosexual attraction with murderous intent is admittedly unfortunate, albeit handled with surprising gentleness, and the way it portrays the ambiguity of desire, however briefly, is as modern as its characterization of its killer is retrograde. Unlikely to be anyone's problematic fave, *Hide and Go Shriek* remains an intriguing, queer curio from a less "woke" era. **RT**

DESTROYER



The late Lyle Alzado was best known as a football player but if you're not into sports and want to witness his prowess in a horror movie, then *Destroyer* is the film for you! Alzado plays a killer named Ivan Moser who is sentenced to death by electrocution. Months later, an irritated director (Anthony Perkins) is shooting his next movie in the shutdown prison and Moser reprises his murder spree. Alzado steals the show with his bulging eyes and sick obsession with licking and eating hair and appendages. Also noteworthy is a gruesome kill with a jackhammer... righteous! **YK**

1989

INTRUDER



More's the pity this flick came along when interest in the first wave of slashers was beginning to wane, because it's an inventive, relentless hot rod of a film that's earned critical accolades without ever enjoying the larger following it deserves. With a veritable Detroit dream team of *Evil Dead* series alumni — including Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell — assuming various duties on both sides of the camera, it's not surprising that writer/director Scott Spiegel's gore-drenched tale of night shift supermarket workers under attack by a psychopath (Raimi regular Dan Hicks) has such tremendous energy. Oh, and two final words: *bandsaw lobotomy*. **JWB** ♥

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ALIEN ORIGINS

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD



WITH THE RELEASES OF HITS LIKE *DRAWN OF THE DEAD*, *THE AMITYVILLE* HORROR AND *PHANTASM* and lower profile but equally important films such as *The Brood* and *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, 1979 was a seminal year for the horror genre. Even amongst these classics, one film above all has wormed its way into the hearts and minds of audiences as its xenomorphic creatures penetrated the mouths and chests of unfortunate victims.

Future documentary filmmaker Alexandre O. Philippe was in his early teens when he first saw Ridley Scott's *Alien*, and even though he viewed it on VHS, it made an indelible impression.

"It's one of those films I waited several years to watch," he remembers. "I had been entranced by the poster, and its incredible tagline, 'In space, no one can hear you scream.' Your mind just goes there when you read that, you know? There was this mix of expectation and dread of watching the film, and

Alien blew me away when I watched it on video for the first time. It actually took a while for me to see it in a theatre, and although it is obviously a big-screen movie, to me, even watching it on VHS or DVD, it's still extraordinarily powerful. It's obviously one of those films that has stayed with me, to the point where here I am making a film about it!"

That film is *Memory*, arriving in select theatres in September from Screen Media after a successful festival tour. Not so much a documentary on *Alien*'s production, it's an engrossing examination of how and why Scott's space shocker had such impact on so many at the time of its release, and continues to do so today.

"It's a contemplation of the power of myth and the collective unconscious, and how we collectively, in a way, summon certain stories onto the silver screen," Philippe explains. "The stories and ideas we need to process as a society somehow wind up finding their way onto film and becoming suc-



cessful, even during times when they're not supposed to be. That's what happened with *Alien*. I mean, you look at a movie that was sandwiched between *Star Wars* and *E.T.*, when people were into friendly, cuddly aliens; it doesn't make much sense that *Alien* would have been a success in 1979, but there it was."

Beyond the fact that this particular extraterrestrial is an acid-dripping killing machine, *Memory* posits that the beginning of its life cycle is encoded with some very uncomfortable metaphors, given that it involves a man (John Hurt's Kane) essentially being orally raped, and later giving birth. The chestbuster scene, still one of the most horrifying set pieces in cinema history, is at the centre of Philippe's examination – much in the way the shower murder served as the basis of the *Psycho* analysis in the filmmaker's previous 78/52, though he notes that *Memory* is not the same sort of documentary.

"People who expect that it's going to be the 78/52 treatment applied to the chestbuster scene are going to be in for a surprise," he says. "It explores certain ideas about cinema that I believe go far deeper than 78/52 did. Don't get me wrong, I'm very proud of 78/52, but *Memory* goes in a different direction. I really believe in stretching my creativity and exploring new things.

"Both the chestbuster and the shower scene had profound effects on audiences when the movies came out, and therefore on culture, but in very distinct ways," he continues. "The subversion in the chestbuster scene was a jolt to audiences back in the day, but the idea that it addressed an unconscious patriarchal guilt, for want of a better term – the idea that those were images people needed to see at the time, that we're still processing now, that we're talking about with the #MeToo movement and all that – is precisely what was so unnerving and upsetting at the time, and continues to be. What's so brilliant is that *Alien* is a movie that forces you to think about those ideas in an intelligent way. It's visceral when you watch it, yet if you start deconstructing it and thinking about what happens in it, you can begin to have a fascinating discussion about our culture and society."

A good deal of the dissection of *Alien*'s meanings involves a look back at the inspirations that led writer Dan O'Bannon to conceive the screenplay (*Memory* was its original title). Although O'Bannon died in 2009, his wife Diane opened up her late husband's archives to Philippe, who says that this expanded the possibilities of what his own movie could be.

"I don't think we would have had a film without the full support and participation of Diane O'Bannon, who gave us access to Dan's extraordinary



Subconscious Subversion: *Alien*'s influences include H.R. Giger's infamous "Necronom IV" and (below) Francis Bacon's "Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion."

material," he states. "There's so much amazing stuff that has never been seen before that we're showing for the first time in *Memory*. I felt very much guided, as strange as it sounds, to make the film the way it is now because of that. It was the very serendipitous encounter with Diane O'Bannon that really changed the direction of the film, once we started getting into Dan's stuff. It makes me very happy that we're able to pay tribute to Dan. I believe he's kind of the forgotten hero of *Alien*, and hopefully, people will be a little more aware of his contributions after watching *Memory*."

The documentary also encompasses a salute to the indelible contributions of the late Swiss artist H.R. Giger (who we learn was actually fired from the project at one point). An earlier painted work that *Memory* reveals became a lesser-known influence on *Alien* was Francis Bacon's triptych "Three Studies for

Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion," which itself was inspired by the Furies, Greek goddesses of revenge. Yet Philippe observes that these images had latent meanings beyond what the filmmakers might have acknowledged at the time.

"When you consider these visceral decisions that Scott made – to look at this triptych by Francis Bacon, and when Dan O'Bannon showed him the 'Necronom IV' painting from Giger's *Necronomicon*, to say, 'This is the creature we're going to use' – all of this, to me, says that there was something at work that went beyond the filmmakers' conscious thought. A lot of things happened during the making of *Alien* where I don't believe Ridley Scott, Dan O'Bannon or H.R. Giger were completely aware of what they were doing."

Philippe himself took a cue from "Three Studies," deciding to open *Memory* with an original sequence of the awakening of the Furies, repre-



sending those subliminal undercurrents.

"I felt that this opening, with the Furies essentially being summoned to life on the deck of the *Nostromo*, was the perfect way to introduce this idea to audiences," he says. "It's a very strange and visceral way to start the movie, but I never questioned it. It took a lot of doing, because we went to Delphi to film the Temple of Apollo, there's some footage we got in Volterra in Italy, and then we worked on a set in Los Angeles. It was a very involved process, but it introduces, in a way that is non-verbal and non-didactic, an idea that is explored throughout the entire film."

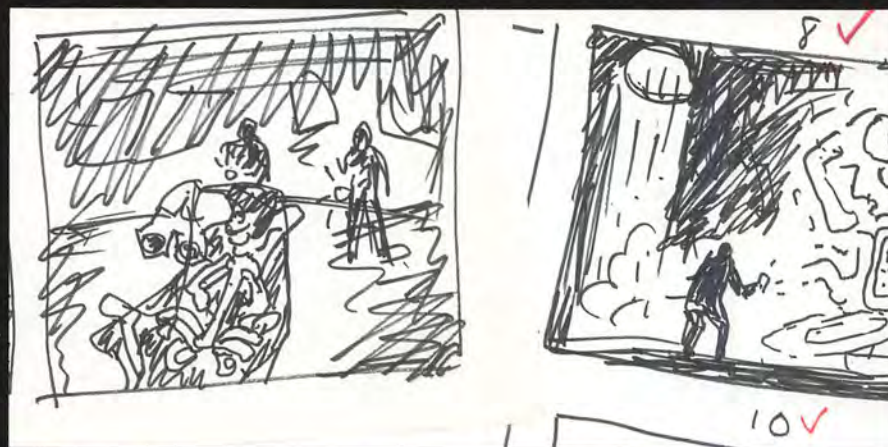
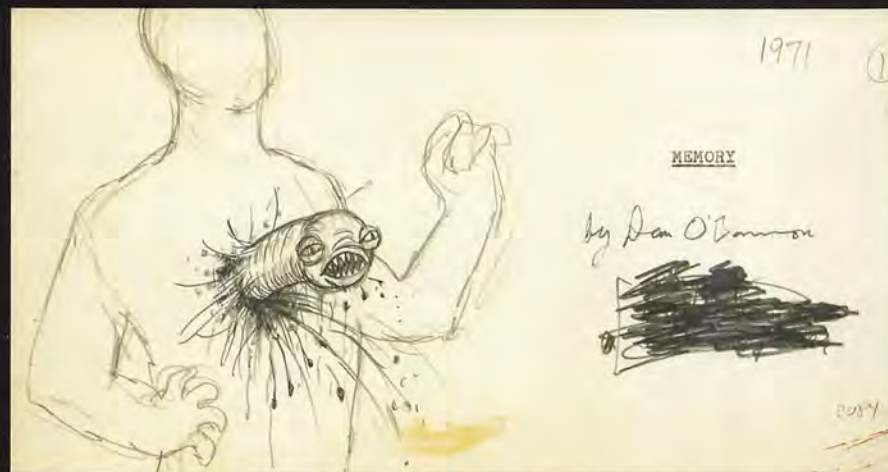
Like Diane O'Bannon, Giger's widow Carmen appears in *Memory*, although Ridley Scott is still with us, he doesn't make an appearance, though that's not for lack of trying on Philippe's part. He recalls that he tried to get Scott on camera "multiple times, and the only people we heard from were the publicists, and they said no. We tried several times; same with Sigourney Weaver. But in a strange way, I think it worked out for the best, because it would be a different film with Scott in it. *Memory* is about the symbiosis between Scott, O'Bannon and Giger, and with two of them gone now, if there was direct input from the other, then suddenly, it would no longer be an essay on that symbiosis. So I believe it works, just like *78/52* is about Hitchcock and it doesn't have Hitchcock, and [my 2010 doc] *The People vs. George Lucas* is about George Lucas but he's not in it.

"I was definitely disappointed that we didn't get Sigourney Weaver," he adds. "Again, we tried, and even after we got the call that we got into Sundance, we went back to her people and it was still a no. You can't argue against those things, but still, that's never going to stop me from making my films."

On the other hand, the end credits reveal that directors William Lustig and Yoshihiro Nishimura were interviewed among others, yet they don't appear in *Memory*.

"Those were very early interviews that were focused on their reactions to the chestbuster," Philippe explains. "As good as those interviews were, they just didn't quite work within the context of what the movie eventually became. There were a number of people I interviewed early on where if I had the chance now, I would go back and re-interview them."

"But there are so many considerations when you're cutting a movie," he points out. "It's not just about what they say, but about the intangible chemistry they have with other people, and how their sound bites interact within the rhythm of the others you have. I never, ever think in terms of, 'We've interviewed this very famous person,



From Sketch To Set: A glimpse at Dan O'Bannon's early sketches and storyboards.

"A LOT OF THINGS HAPPENED DURING THE MAKING OF *ALIEN* WHERE I DON'T BELIEVE RIDLEY SCOTT, DAN O'BANNON OR H.R. GIGER WERE COMPLETELY AWARE OF WHAT THEY WERE DOING."

-DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER ALEXANDRE D. PHILIPPE

therefore we must have that person in the film.' To give you an example: When we did *The People vs. George Lucas*, we went to the UK to interview Ray Harryhausen, and he was great; we wound up with this hour-and-a-half-long interview with him. And Harryhausen didn't make the cut — not because what he had to say wasn't great or interesting, it just didn't fit within the context of the final product. I've never wavered from that particular approach — it's not about how famous you are, or what kind of a name you have, but whether you fit within the story I'm trying to tell."

The next story he's telling is that of another horror landmark; he's currently working on *Leap*

of Faith, about *The Exorcist* and William Friedkin, who came to Philippe about doing the doc. Making movies like these, he says, is his way of keeping great cinema alive.

"In this age of content we're in, we have to put a spotlight on our greatest masters," Philippe asserts. "Giving that attention to what they do and how they think is extraordinarily important for future generations of filmmakers, and for audiences. I look at my films as, ideally, a bridge between general audiences and cinema studies, to make this idea of analyzing movies fun and enjoyable to people who don't consider themselves film students or scholars." 🙌



A GLIMPSE AT FREE LEAGUE'S ALIEN: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME CINEMATIC STARTER KIT

DICE ROLL HORROR

BY EVAN MILLAR

UNLIKE THE VAST REACHES OF SPACE, IN YOUR LIVING ROOM, EVERYONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM.

When it comes to sci-fi horror, it's hard to top Ridley Scott's *Alien*. With wailing sirens, strobing lights, and the encroaching terror of a malevolent extraterrestrial looking to make mincemeat out of a crew already at odds with each other, it's a hostile setting perfectly suited for tales of dread among the stars.

Now, just in time for *Alien*'s 40th anniversary, award-winning Swedish developer Free League Publishing (*Tales from the Loop*, *Mutant: Year Zero*) has taken on the challenge of bringing the franchise to the tabletop setting for the first time since Leading Edge's 1991 *Aliens Adventure Game*.

Set to fully launch later this year, *ALIEN: The Roleplaying Game* thrusts players into the year 2183, a few years after the dissolution of the double-Y chromosome correctional facility and lead-smelting works on Fiorina 161 seen in David Fincher's *Alien 3*.

Building on the corporate and political espionage of Weyland-Yutani and its imperialist methodologies, the game's Cinematic Starter Kit paints a dangerous and tense backdrop in the wake of the Hadley's Hope incident on LV-426. Worrying rumours run rampant, and the hatching of biological weapons guarantees almost certain war in the coming cycles.

Guided by the GM or Game Mother (think MUTHUR), *ALIEN: The Roleplaying Game* sees a small group of players crafting their own PCs (player characters), which fall under one of the game's three main occupations: frontier colonists, space truckers, and colonial marines.

After choosing the scenario's major theme or themes (space horror, sci-fi action or sense of wonder), players then embark on a journey of creative storytelling that functions as a sort of collaborative dialogue that forms the basis of the tale being told, with actions determined by an existing set of

skills and traits, or the roll of a die.

In *ALIEN: The Roleplaying Game*, GMs and PCs have their pick of two modes of play: cinematic or campaign. While the former is best suited for contained sessions lasting several hours, akin to an *Alien* film, the latter is an expansive long-form variant that's only as limited as its players' imaginations, better lending itself to multiple gameplay sessions.

As if the threat of lurking Xenomorphs wasn't worrisome enough, each player has a rival PC chosen before the game begins, ensuring that human-on-human (or android) tensions await. There's a bright side, however, as an ally can also be selected for even more elaborate roleplaying purposes.

The first of Free League's planned cinematic modes is *Chariot of the Gods*, fully loaded with a cast of premade PCs and environments ready for play. With several location maps and three detailed acts, it's a perfect launching point for newcomers and tabletop veterans alike, rife with rich storytelling potential.

Though the Xenomorph we know and fear doesn't make an appearance in the 168-page Cinematic Starter Kit, the pale Neomorphs of *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant* are comprehensively documented in all their terrifying glory, as are the once-human "abominations" left in the wake of exposure to mutagenic agent AO-3959X.91-15. Decidedly more than just a mouthful to pronounce, this genetic accelerant quickly transforms its victims in a series of four stages, the last of which is the "Beluga-Head," a grotesque splicing of their former human shell and the Xenomorph XX121.

Much remains to be seen in terms of just how *ALIEN: The Roleplaying Game* will continue to expand and develop, but as the Cinematic Starter Kit already proves, the franchise is in extremely capable

hands. So grab a group of friends, dim the lights, and get ready for the colossal bitterness of space. 🐛



A HORROR FAN'S WET DREAM CAME TRUE BACK IN 1982, WHEN STEPHEN KING AND GEORGE A. ROMERO TEAMED UP FOR THE ANTHOLOGY MOVIE **CREEPSHOW**. NOW, AMC JOINS FORCES WITH SHUDDER, GREG NICOTERO, AND A TEAM OF GENRE POWERHOUSES FOR A MUCH ANTICIPATED REBOOT

RETURN OF THE CREEP

by **ANDREA SUBISSATI**



WHEN GENRE GIANTS STEPHEN KING AND GEORGE A. ROMERO JOINED FORCES FOR HORROR-COMEDY ANTHOLOGY MOVIE **CREEPSHOW**, expectations were appropriately high. Unleashed in the post-Halloween glow of November 1982, the film was a financial success, but it left critics scratching their heads. Neither writer nor director were especially known for their comedy chops, for one thing, and *Creepshow*'s warty green tongue all but poked through its rotting cheek, with humour that ran the gamut from slapstick to satire with some of the most memorable one-lin-

THE OFFICIAL 2019 **CREEPSHOW** EPISODE GUIDE

#1

"ALL HALLOWS EVE"

Written by Bruce Jones

Directed by John Harrison

Even when they're a little too old, this group of friends still want to trick-or-treat but getting candy isn't all they are looking for.

#2

"BAD WOLF DOWN"

Written by Rob Schrab

Directed by Rob Schrab

A group of American soldiers, trapped behind enemy lines during World War II, finds an unconventional way to even the odds.

#3

"BY THE SILVER WATER OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN"

Story by Joe Hill, adapted by

Jason Ciaramella

Directed by Tom Savini

Her dad died looking for the monster living at the bottom of Lake Champlain, and now, will she?

#4

"THE COMPANION"

Story by Joe R. Lansdale, Kasey Lansdale, and Keith Lansdale

Adapted by Matt Venne

Directed by David Bruckner

A young boy, bullied by his older brother, sneaks into an abandoned farm that is protected by a supernatural force.

ers ever committed to celluloid. The film's 1950s pulp comic book aesthetic was also something of a novelty, with Romero mainstay Tom Savini pushing his makeup FX skills to new heights of garish gore, and unforgettable performances by familiar faces the likes of Adrienne Barbeau, Leslie Nielsen, Ted Danson and Ed Harris.

But it worked – not only did a happy box office herald a pair of sequels (with lessening involvement from Romero and King), but many modern horror heavyweights cite *Creepshow* as their first kiss with the genre, one that left them smitten for life. Count among them fiction authors Joe Lansdale and Josh Malerman, who are both contributing short stories to Shudder's upcoming episodic reboot. With showrunner Greg Nicotero at the helm, both writers are confident the new show will allow fans of the original film to once more have their cake. Indeed, both authors cite their first viewing of *Creepshow* as a pivotal moment that sparked a lifelong passion for the genre.

"It was at my dad's friend's house," recalls Malerman, who wrote and adapted the segment "House of the Head," originally published in 2017's *New Fears*. "It was me with my younger brother and some other kids that were there and we're watching it, and my first experience was that other kids were laughing at 'I want my cake' and Jordy Verrill's 'meteor shit.' The kids are all laughing and I was totally scared the whole time! I was eight or nine years old, it was one of the first scary movies I ever saw. I remember being scared to the point where I had to leave the room during 'The Crate'... there was nothing funny about that one at that time."



Ph: Rob Draper



Ph: Boris Martin

The Most Fun You'll Ever Have Being Scared: Scenes from episodes "Bad Wolf Down" and "The Companion."

"I was a big fan of King's work and stuff and I also like the old comics, like *Tales From the Crypt* and things like that," adds Lansdale whose short story "The Companion" is being adapted by Matt Venne (*Fright Night 2*) and directed by David Bruckner (*The Ritual*) for the reboot. "I went to

see it and it knocked me out because it was just like watching a comic book come to life." Lansdale has another personal tie to the title in that he had written "The Companion" with his children, Kasey and Keith. Originally penned for a YA anthology, their *Creepshow* episode stands to rectify some creative compromises the trio made back in 1994. "My son was twelve, [Kasey] was eight," he explains. "I said, 'Here's a basic idea,' and so then my son wrote it and I polished the spelling and things like that, and kind of kicked the ball back into play, and then my daughter came up with some of the more evil aspects of the story. The story was so strong, [the publisher] came back and said, 'This is good but it's for a young adult anthology, we're thinking you're going to have to pull these scenes out of it.' One of them was a person that was hanged in the closet, and I went and told my daughter, eight years old, and she said, 'Oh, hell. It's just not the same!' So we changed that, and what Matt has done is he's put what we intended, at least in tone, back in." For Malerman, having grown up with *Creepshow*, contributing to a modern reboot for two seasons is tantamount to realizing a childhood dream he never dared have. "Brian [Witten] is a producer on [the upcoming feature] *A House at the Bottom of a Lake*, which I wrote the screenplay for. So I'm working with Brian, and at some point he was like, 'Hey, me and Greg Nicotero are doing *Creepshow* for Shudder,' and I was like, 'Oh my God, can I send you, like, a hundred stories?' He said, 'Yeah, you can send us, like, two.' So I sent him six stories, and he and Greg picked two, one for each of the first

#5

"THE FINGER"

Written by David J. Schow
Directed by Greg Nicotero

An unhappy man discovers a severed, inhuman appendage on the street and brings it home, where it grows into a loyal companion with some deadly quirks.

#6

"GRAY MATTER"

Story by Stephen King
Adapted by Byron Willinger and Phillip de Blasi
Directed by Greg Nicotero

Doc and Chief, two old-timers in a small, dying town, brave a storm to check on Richie, an alcoholic single father, after encountering his terrified son at the local convenience

store. The story, first published in 1973, is part of King's best-selling 1978 collection *Night Shift*.

#7

"THE HOUSE OF THE HEAD"

Written by Josh Malerman
Directed by John Harrison
Evie discovers her new dollhouse might be haunted.

#8

"LYDIA LAYNE'S BETTER HALF"

Story by John Harrison and Greg Nicotero

Adapted by John Harrison
Directed by Roxanne Benjamin
A powerful woman denies a promotion to her protégée and lover but fails to anticipate the fallout.



Ph: Creepshow/Shudder



Ph: Boris Martin

Creeping It Real: Showrunner Greg Nicotero's expertise in gruesome effects is evident in episodes (left) "House of the Head" and (right) "Grey Matter."

two seasons that they had planned."

For the new *Creepshow* reboot, AMC has amassed an all-star cast for the first two seasons, including *Saw*'s Tobin Bell, *Re-Animator*'s Jeffrey Combs, a returning Adrienne Barbeau, and musicians Kid Cudi and Big Boi. With Nicotero and Savini involved, the gore is guaranteed, but the authors promise that the original film's trademark campy wit will be ported over to the new series as well.

"I remember talking to my manager about it, how my short story isn't necessarily funny," says Malerman, "but there is a levity through *Creepshow*. Even 'The Crate' [is funny] now that I'm an adult. So I tried to add that kind of thing organically without hamming it up."

"I think they're going for the same tone but it can't help but differ," adds Lansdale. "There's a new generation of writers out there and they have a somewhat different approach; many of them have been influenced by what's gone

before, some were influenced by other genres, like me. But I feel certain that in the end, the final combination of these stories will capture that same tone as *Creepshow* did. I mean, you've got Greg Nicotero involved, so I don't see how it could not."

AMC and Shudder have been tight-lipped about the details, apart from a glimpse at its iconic host (known as "the Creep") and an episode guide (see sidebar), but both contributors have seen enough to be excited about its potential.

"[Producers] haven't exactly kept us in the dark, but they're only letting us know what we need to know, which I think is pretty smart," says Lansdale. "I don't want to give away anything but I will tell you this: if you're

looking for the old *Creepshow*, you're going to get it, but you're also going to get something a little bit different. The episodes too, some are

longer than others and some are a slightly different tone but it's the same with how the original movie dealt with these different episodes like a comic book, it's the same. But it's got a little more bite, I'll say that much."

"They're going to just go the distance with every single [episode]," agrees Malerman. "It's Greg Nicotero, it's *Creepshow*, it's Shudder... it's funny to say that it has emotional resonance because it's gory and funny, but it does! It's to me like the epitome of everything that's great

about '80s horror."

And that's no meteor shit. ☹️



#9

"THE MAN IN THE SUITCASE"

Written by Christopher Buehlman
Directed by David Bruckner

A college student brings the wrong bag home from the airport only to find a pretzeled man trapped inside, afflicted by a strange condition that turns his pain into gold.

#10

"NIGHT OF THE PAW"

Written by John Esposito
Directed by John Harrison

A lonely mortician finds company in the ultimate 'be careful what you wish for' story.

#11

"SKINCRAWLERS"

Written by Paul Dini and Stephen Langford
Directed by Roxanne Benjamin

A man considers a miraculous new treatment for weight loss that turns out to have unexpected complications.

#12

"TIMES IS TOUGH IN MUSKY HOLLER"

Written by John Skipp and Dori Miller
Directed by John Harrison

Leaders who once controlled a town through fear and intimidation get a taste of their own medicine.

In Memoriam

ANDREW BAILLES

February 10, 1966 July 19, 2019



We are deeply saddened by the recent passing of the Gore-met (a.k.a. Andrew Bailles), beloved *Rue Morgue* columnist for nearly two decades. Thank you for bringing your wealth of knowledge to our pages; you will always be a part of the *Rue Morgue* family.

Rest In Peace



FRESH RELEASES



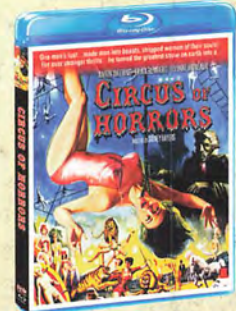
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OUT OCTOBER 1
ARTWORK SUBJECT TO CHANGE



BRIGHTBURN
OUT AUGUST 20



CHILD'S PLAY
OUT SEPTEMBER 24
ARTWORK SUBJECT TO CHANGE



CIRCUS OF HORRORS
OUT SEPTEMBER 10



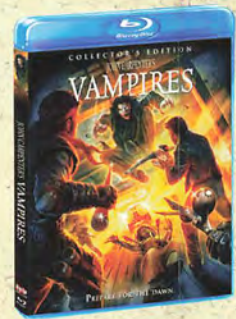
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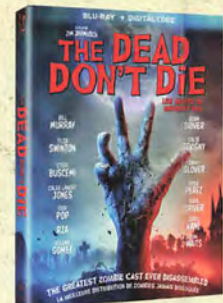
MIDSOMMAR
COMING SOON
ARTWORK SUBJECT TO CHANGE



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OUT SEPTEMBER 3



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OUT SEPTEMBER 10



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OUT SEPTEMBER 10

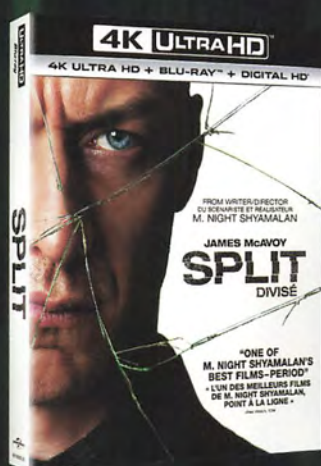


**KING GIZZARD AND
THE LIZARD WIZARD:
INFEST THE RATS' NEST**
OUT AUGUST 16

SUNRISE RECORDS



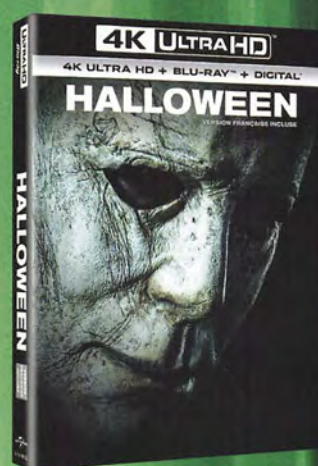
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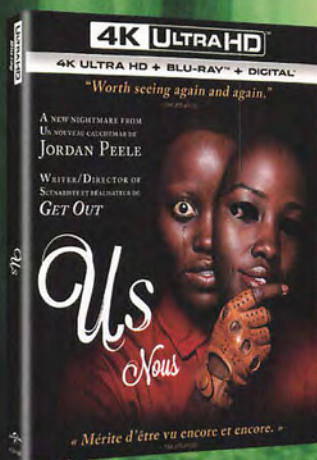
GLASS
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HALLOWEEN (2018)
DVD/BLU-RAY/4K



GET OUT
DVD/BLU-RAY/4K



US
DVD/BLU-RAY/4K

SUNRISE
RECORDS



UNIVERSAL STUDIOS
HOME ENTERTAINMENT

MANY ASPECTS OF TOM SAVINI'S STORIED CAREER IN MAKEUP EFFECTS ARE A MATTER OF PUBLIC RECORD AMONG HORROR FANS,

BUT MANY MORE ARE NOT. OR AT LEAST THEY WON'T BE UNTIL THE RELEASE

OF SAVINI, A COFFEE-TABLE-FRIENDLY COMBINATION AUTOBIOGRAPHY, ON-SET

JOURNAL AND PHOTO ALBUM, DUE OUT THIS NOVEMBER FROM DARK INK

UNDER THE SKIN WITH TOM SAVINI

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

MOST OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN CINEMATIC VISUAL EFFECTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIALTIES: Lon Chaney Sr. and Jack Pierce with early makeup effects, Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen with stop-motion animation and creature design, George Lucas and his posse with miniatures and green screen trickery. But when one makes one's bones (and flesh, and blood, and entrails) in the late '70s with *Dawn of the Dead* and the early '80s with *Friday the 13th* and several of its slasher offspring, well, one tends to get typed as the go-to gore guy, despite having long since compiled a much more diverse resume as both designer and teacher. In his new book (out Nov. 3 from Dark Ink Books), effects icon Tom Savini doesn't bemoan his lot; he's justifiably proud of his cinematic accomplishments but he'd like to let you in on a whole lot more.

In primarily stream-of-consciousness fashion, Savini recounts pivotal episodes from his childhood and teens in Pittsburgh's Little Italy, his tour of duty in Vietnam and his earliest experiences in the performing arts – not as an effects whiz but as a stage actor, as often as not involving song and dance. The man who later gave us *Maniac*'s infamous facial shotgun blast and multiple dismemberments and disembowelings in George Romero's zombie classics once played King Arthur in *Camelot*, Bernardo in *West Side Story*, Benjamin Franklin in *1776*, the title role (seriously!) in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, and trod the boards in other hit fare including *Godspell*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cactus Flower*, *Man of La Mancha* and many more. The book also includes detailed journals of his experiences acting in *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Machete*, *Lost Boys: The Tribe* and *Django Unchained*. And somewhere in between all of the above, you'll learn how and when Tom Savini lost his virginity. Just in case you wondered.

Rue Morgue recently had a chance to peruse an early proof of the book and chat with Savini about how he wrote this teeming tome, as well as when and why.

Between your popularity with genre film fans and the fact that you're no stranger to publishing, I'm kind of surprised it took you this long to do a memoir.

Yeah, but we've been working on this one for years.

An enjoyable experience? Daunting? Anything in between?

Certainly daunting, because just on my phone there are over 5000 photos, so the first thing I did was compile a file of pictures for the book. Because it's a big coffee-table picture book; it's sort of my biography but it's also got journals that I kept while making some of these films. Over 200 pages and just a shitload of photos.

Aside from compiling and editing photos, how long did the actual text take to write?

Well, years, because I was writing between jobs. When a job comes up, I'm gone for two months, sometimes three. So I did it when I could, sometimes from home, sometimes hotel rooms. I'd say three or four years and then we took a year just to edit the thing – "Should this be in there? Should I have done

this? Should I say this kind of stuff?" Just cutting stuff, adding stuff.

There's some pretty deeply personal stuff in there, particularly from your childhood and teens. Did you have any trepidation about going there?



Well, yeah, there was. There's a section on how I lost my virginity (laughs). You don't need to hear me talking about my sexual exploits but we're talking about something people can identify with. I was thirteen. And in my mind, that was linked to all these things about going to grade school in [Pittsburgh's] Little Italy. It was personal and I asked the publisher, "Should we leave this in?" and they said, "Definitely, yes." To me, I can hardly object, because it's all me. There's also a documentary on me called *Smoke and Mirrors* that's currently in the hands of Shudder Entertainment, and I showed [an early cut] at the Sitges Film Festival. At the end, I remember getting in front of the audience and apologizing for all the personal stuff, but they said, "No, no, that's what we want!" They know me through my work, my movies, but it was the personal stuff that they were most interested in. There are [personal] things in the book, like the day I was kidnapped – something very, very personal from when I was seven or eight years old. And that was an example of "Should we leave this in?" And we did *because* it's personal.

You've spoken many times about the Vietnam War having informed your work in a big way, but there are some revelations – or maybe just new perspectives – about that experience here.

Well, first of all, I wanted to dispel the myth that my interest in effects began in Vietnam – it certainly didn't. But Vietnam was a lesson to me in anatomy and it certainly inspired my reputation for realism, because if the fake stuff that I created didn't give me the same feeling as the real stuff, then the fake stuff wasn't real enough. When I was judging on *Face Off*, a student came up to me with a makeup that was supposed to be a napalm victim. Now, I'm the only makeup artist that has seen the real thing. It was inspired! There are examples of things that other makeup artists get wrong in movies that disturb me. One I saw last night, a thing with Kevin Costner and Woody Harrelson called *Highwaymen*, about hunting down Bonnie and Clyde. I thought it was really good, *but* when they cut to Bonnie and Clyde being killed in the car, bullet holes all over them, the actors are sitting there with these pleasant expressions on their faces! And most disturbing was that their mouths were closed, as if they wanted to look good for the camera! One of the things I keep telling my students is, if you're dead, all the muscles in your body don't work any more, *including* your jaw. I have a big problem when I see actors portraying dead people without their jaw being slack! There are only a couple of actors I know – Danny Trejo, Peter Coyote – who portray the dead realistically by letting their mouths hang open. They don't care about looking pretty for the camera. Also, in the movies when they go to a crime scene a day later, two days later, the blood is still red! Well, it wouldn't be – it'd be brown! Burnt umber! They



A Thousand Faces: (top) In addition to being a prolific FX artist, Savini is also a stage actor (bottom left), and a son (right).

make this mistake in movies all the time. I've told Quentin Tarantino and I preach it to my students, because again, your point of view is based upon your experience.

You mention a lot of your peers in this book – especially the KNB guys – and it would appear there's more camaraderie than competition between you all. Has it always been like that?

Yes. It's never been a competition – it's a brotherhood. I'll call up Rick Baker: "How did you do this or that?" Or people will call me, [saying] "Hey, I learned how to make teeth from your book!" When Dick Smith was alive – the greatest living makeup artist on the planet – he was the only guy who shared his secrets. Growing up, it was tough to learn because nobody [else] shared these secrets.

Today it seems Smith is revered not only for his art but also his generosity with other practitioners of that art.

He was the influence on me to write my first book [*Grande Illusions*: 1983]. He allowed me to use the Xeroxes and mimeographs that he sent

me when I'd call him on the phone and ask him questions. He would spend hours on the phone discussing some technique, then he'd Xerox [the illustrations and instructions] and send them to me. He invented everything that we do. You know, we improve and enhance it, but it's all from him. So [nowadays] we all share our work, share secrets. Sometimes I'll go to a movie as if I'm going to an exhibit from my favourite artist.

There are plenty of women in your field now, but none have become widely recognized brand names like you, Rob Bottin, KNB, and a few others. Do you see that changing any time soon?

It's interesting – at our school we're going on our twentieth year and the students come from all over the world. And lately, the last five or six classes that have come in, *big* classes, 50, 60 students coming in – they're mostly women and, like, two guys. Used to be all guys and the occasional woman, now it's almost all women!

So accordingly, do you think we'll see a proliferation of big-name female makeup effects artists over the next decade?

TOM SAVINI'S REMAKE OF GEORGE A. ROMERO'S
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD WASN'T QUITE THE MOVIE
HE WANTED TO MAKE. HIS NEW BOOK, *NIGHT OF THE
LIVING DEAD '90: THE VERSION YOU'VE NEVER SEEN*,
EXPLAINS WHY

TOM GETS HIS TAKE

ANY FILMMAKER WILL TELL YOU THAT MAKING MOVIES IS A PUNISHING GIG; from budgets to studio interference, a director's true artistic vision rarely makes it to the screen in the way they intended. For Tom Savini, whose horror resume spans decades and includes gigs as an actor, stuntman and special effects artist, his debut as director of the 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead* remains one of the most frustrating projects of his career. Out this October from Happy Cloud Media, *Night of the Living Dead '90: The Version You've Never Seen*, is both a candid account of the film's storied production history and a glimpse at the film Savini really wanted to make.

Available now via pre-order from happycloudpictures.net, the 150-page book contains not only behind-the-scenes photos from Savini's personal collection and testimonials from cast and crew, but also storyboards detailing some gruesome sequences that never made it to film. One standout example is a POV shot from the perspective of a bullet fired into a zombie's mouth and through its rotting head, leaving Barbara framed through a bloody, brain-encrusted hole.

Savini's colourful, gory tweak to *NotLD*'s black-and-white Bosco bloodfeast should have been a slam dunk – a horror classic, rewritten by its original writer and given a new coat of paint by an established SFX guru with a budget of \$4.7 million (the original film cost \$130,000, by comparison). Still, big money means big compromises, and while Savini's take on *NotLD* remains one of the better horror remakes, the filmmaker has been notoriously tight-lipped (and frankly, a little bit grumpy) when it's mentioned at conventions.

In tandem with his new autobiography, *Night of the Living Dead '90: The Version You've Never Seen* promises an intimate glimpse at an artist that did many things his way, albeit not all of them. Maybe third time's the charm?

ANDREA SUBISSATI



A Title Befitting A Tom: "They're calling me the Maestro of Makeup, which I prefer."

Well, it's already happening. Howard Berger of KNB is constantly putting up photos [online] of crew members he works with and loves. Look at the credits, look at the names – who the hell did this?

You're still known as the gore guy even though your repertoire is much wider than that and there are others in the business – Rob Bottin springs to mind – who are known for creature designs but can chop off heads with the best of them. Do you see the future trending more towards specializing or do you think the demand will be for effects people who are well-rounded?

I think well-rounded. My popularity stems from the '80s and that was the splatter decade, so I became the Sultan of Splatter, the King of Gore. I've asked my student PR people to not call me that anymore. They're calling me the Maestro of Makeup, which I prefer [laughs]. And that is more rounded, more realistic as it applies to my career. *Creepshow* was big for me – that was the beginning of not being the King of Gore anymore, but being one of the guys who creates the monsters.

That must have been a refreshing change for you back then.

Absolutely, yeah. In *Smoke and Mirrors*, Howard Berger notes that his favourite show of mine is *Creepshow*. Because anybody can cut a throat, anybody can blow up a head with a shotgun, which I became famous for. But he thought *Creepshow* was the beginning of me being noted as a creature creator.

Speaking of which, I've seen Maniac many, many times but I never saw The Prowler until about two weeks ago and I simply have to know, before we wind this up, which film has your favourite cranial shotgun blast?

Aha! Well, let's see. *Maniac* is pretty good. I'd never fired a shotgun through a windshield before and I think there were four cameras running on my [fake] head exploding. I also blew off a head in *Dawn of the Dead*. [In that instance] there was a physical effects guy who tried to blow up the head from within, but the head just expanded and contracted and never blew up. So I said, "Gimme that fuckin' shotgun!" and I blew the head off. And that same guy went on and did *Scanners*, with that beautiful head explosion, and he did it from behind. So [the one in] *Dawn of the Dead* was pretty good, but let's see, which one did I like best? Oh, there was also one in my [remake of] *Night of the Living Dead* [1990] that was actually cut from the film and that was probably one of my best. That footage is included in a documentary on the DVD and the Blu-ray of *Night of the Living Dead '90*. But you know [laughs], everybody still thinks of *Maniac*! 🐼



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MEMENTO MORGUE



1. Adrienne Barbeau with RM Executive Editor Andrea Subissati. 2. Tom Atkins with RM's James Burrell. 3. Games Editor Evan Millar at the 2018 Frightmare in the Falls. 4. Michael Gingold, Deirdre Crimmins and Andrea at Montreal's Fantasia Film Festival. 5. The Rewind's Zone's Yasmina Ketita with Andrea. 6. Toronto's Diet Ghosts at RM's Queer Issue launch party. 7. Alison Lang gets slimed on Rue Morgue TV.



8. *Assassination Nation* director Sam Levinson and Andrea at TIFF. 9. The Soska Sisters with RM president Rodrigo Gudino. 10. *Halloween III*'s Tom Atkins and Tommy Lee Wallace with RMTV's Joe O'Brien. 11. Andrea conducts *Midsommar* Q&A with director Ari Aster and star Jack Raynor. (Photo credit: Will Wong) 12. Music Editor Aaron Von Lupton, flanked by the late Steve Dash and C.J. Graham. 13. The Rue Crew at the 2018 Frightmare in the Falls. 14. Andrea with Michael Myers and *The Faculty of Horror* co-host Alexandra West at Salem Horror Fest.

CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



THIRD TIME'S THE BOMB

3 FROM HELL

Starring Sheri Moon Zombie, Bill Moseley and Richard Brake

Written and directed by Rob Zombie
Lionsgate/Saban Films

It's difficult to discuss Rob Zombie's *3 From Hell* without venturing into spoiler territory, so if you don't want one of its major (if early) developments given away, skip down to the next paragraph. On the other hand, some fans might want to be forewarned that the titular trio of terror does not include Sid Haig's Captain Spaulding. He's out of the picture early on, replaced by Winslow Foxworth Coltrane (Richard Brake from Zombie's *31*), a heretofore undisclosed relative of the Firefly clan who joins Baby (Sheri Moon Zombie) and Otis (Bill Moseley) on a new rampage. Brake gives good menace, but Coltrane is cut from too similar a cloth to Otis, and their interactions lack the dangerously squabbly spark that Otis and Spaulding had in their previous adventures.

3 from Hell is set largely in 1988, when the Fireflies have managed to survive their gun-blast-

ed fates at the end of *The Devil's Rejects* and been incarcerated while becoming media sensations – a promising story thread that's abandoned after the opening act. Following a violent escape, they set out for revenge against those who put them away, then head for a Mexican border town for more shenanigans. And...that's it, really, plus Zombie's traditional trashy stylings and characters, extreme gore and foul language.

The savage intensity of *Devil's Rejects* is lacking, though, as the near two-hour running time feels padded with unpleasanties, and it's hard to feel much engagement when everybody on screen is so de-ranked, gross and/or corrupt.

Zombie still demonstrates that he knows his way around a tense set piece, but where *Rejects* and *House of 1000 Corpses* play like tours of Hell with an enthusiastic guide, this film feels as if the writer/director has left us behind to wallow in the sadism and debasement.

At a certain point, two of the characters discuss the possibility of getting into the porn-making business; one suggests a sex scene with a dog, and the other replies, "Save that for the sequel." It's an appropriate line for a trilogy-closer that ultimately screws the pooch.

KEN MICHAELS



AMERICAN PIE-CHO

BLOODLINE

Starring Seann William Scott, Mariela Garriga and Dale Dickey

Directed by Henry Jacobson

Written by Avra Fox-Lerner and Will Honley
Blumhouse

I anticipate that a horror movie starring Seann William Scott will cause some to wonder if they really want to watch a movie that features *American Pie*'s teen perv Stifler as a serial killer. I get the concern, but would like to remind folks that Scott's been working for two decades since *Pie*, including 2011's surprisingly charming *Goon* and a horror turn in *Final Destination* (2000). The guy's got more range than people give him credit for, including some apparent sociopathic chops in Blumhouse's latest.

Here, Scott plays Evan, a high school social worker adjusting to parenthood with his wife, Lauren (Mariela Garriga). The stress of raising a newborn takes its toll on the young couple, so Evan invites his mom Marie (Dale Dickey) to come provide support, thus freeing Evan up



to indulge in his regular routine of strategically stalking and murdering people he deems a threat to the well-being of his students.

Bloodline doesn't bring anything terribly new to the serial killer subgenre, with story beats that mimic TV's *Dexter* and a tone that evokes Franck Khalfoun's 2012 *Maniac* remake. But writing duo Avra Fox-Lerner and Will Hornley provide a few extra nature-versus-nurture morsels to chew on that keep the narrative engaging, while director Henry Jacobson keeps the pace tight and tense throughout.

And dammit, I like Seann William Scott as a sociopath. He's got the clenched-teeth demeanour of someone using every ounce of strength to just barely seem normal. Garriga's equally compelling to watch as she navigates both Dickey's strong-willed mama bear routine and her own growing suspicions about the true nature of her husband's late-night outings. Overall, *Bloodline* may not change the way you watch serial killer movies, but it beats a knife to the throat.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

A SCREAMY PLACE

HAUNT

Starring Katie Stevens, Will Britain
and Laurn Alisa McClain
Written and directed by Bryan Woods and Scott Beck
Momentum Pictures

Thrill-seekers encounter more than they bargained for when they enter an "extreme" haunted house which promises to deliver on their darkest

fears. Also on the menu: actual murder, apparently. Locked in a dark, dirty industrial room with one of their number bleeding out on the floor, the friends suddenly find themselves facing a fight for their very lives. Or do they? One can never quite tell with this sort of thing...



The directorial debut of *A Quiet Place* co-writers Bryan Woods and Scott Beck, *Haunt* boasts an intriguing hook – a McKamey Manor-style haunted house in which the stakes are really real (or... are they?). This isn't the first time horror cinema has played with such a conceit (see the recent '80s-steeped slasher *Hell Fest* for just one of many examples), nor has it really been done justice yet. Like the poor unfortunate souls lining up at the doors of extreme haunted houses around the country, we're all suckers for a good scare, no matter how many times we've been burned by poor execution.

Unfortunately, *Haunt* is less than forthcoming in delivering on its promises. While it has an authentically grimy *Saw* aesthetic, its shocks are

particularly tame; as disappointing as its own fictional haunted house. Populated by clowns in rubber masks, creepy mannequins and victims that may or may not be real, none of it is particularly original or imaginative – a shame, given the film's slick looks and sick gore. Woods and Beck have a keen eye for set-up and atmosphere too, but none of this makes *Haunt* any less of a slog and, even when the film's few surprises do kick in, it's too little too late.

JOEL HARLEY

THE DEVIL DID IT

SATANIC PANIC

Starring Hayley Griffith, Rebecca Romijn
and Jerry O'Connell
Directed by Chelsea Stardust
Written by Grady Hendrix and Ted Geoghegan
Fangoria Films/Apture Entertainment

Broke, fresh-faced millennial Sam (Hayley Griffith) is on the first day of her pizza delivery gig when she gets sent to deliver a couple of extra-large pies to an exclusive neighbourhood on the wealthy side of town. Finding herself out of gas money, she finds a way into the house to reason with the asshole who stiffed her on the tip – only to find herself at the opening ceremonies of a rich coven determined to bring the demon Baphomet into the world in order to increase its wealth and power.



Satanic Panic



Grady Hendrix's excellent script balances horror comedy with social satire and a serendipitous amount of character development. Sam initially (and obviously) fits the trope of the earnest innocent, and her gender-neutral nickname marks her as a Final Girl off the bat, yet as the movie progresses, Hendrix reveals a back story that is at once horrific and sad, setting off the supernatural terror by showing her strength through her vulnerability. By contrast, Rebecca Romijn's icy satanic priestess is exposed by moments of irony as she balances the realities of the Dark Lord's rituals with upper-middle-class concerns about stains on the carpet. And questions of social class are the dark, diseased heart of this narrative, reflected in the contrast between the bleached colours of Sam's beat-up Vespa and the strip-mall pizza shop where she works, and the dark, jewel tones of the devil-worshippers' world, but brought to the surface in the willingness of the rich to use Sam as a resource, with complete disregard for her humanity.

Director Chelsea Stardust, on the other hand, wields the camera so that we never forget it – and, in the middle of the laughs and the gore, gives us a cold, unflinching stare at those who would exploit people with less power than themselves.

CLAIRE HORSNELL



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE APPROPRIATES THE APOCALYPSE

THE FINAL BEAT DOWN



THE MIDNIGHT AFTER

Well Go USA Entertainment

Believe it, the apocalypse is coming! It might be war, earthquake, famine, plague or zombies, but one thing is for sure, we're all fucked. Hopefully not as bad as the seventeen people in this Chinese film, who find themselves alone in an abandoned city after taking a mini-bus through a tunnel from Hong Kong to Tai Po. Unable to contact the outside world, they start dying off in increasingly horrendous ways, including being burnt alive and raped to death in the bushes. Even with that level of violence to its credit, *The Midnight After* can't quite decide if

it's a straight-up horror or a comedy, especially when it breaks into a karaoke version of David Bowie's "Space Oddity." So order the #15 with noodles, sit back and enjoy, if only to understand what *not* to do when the end is nigh.

BODY COUNT: 18

BEST DEATH: Armless guy drowns in a fish tank

THE END IS AWRY



ZODIAC: SIGNS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Anchor Bay Entertainment

Ancient civilizations were great at two things – building pyramids and predicting the end of the world. That's the basis of this film, after scientists discover an ancient Sumerian inscription claiming the end is imminent. Sounds great on paper, but this film suffers from catastrophic acting and cataclysmic computer graphics. Fact: I could have done a better job on the CGI volcanoes, tidal waves and meteor showers using a phone app. A sign of the end times (career?) arrives in the bliss-

fully brief cameo by Christopher Lloyd, who must be doomsday prepping after seeing his name in these credits. My prediction is that you'll hate this movie instantly!

BODY COUNT: 8

BEST DEATH: Scientist sucked up by a cyclone

APOCALYPSE LO-FI



AFTER

MVD Visual

Two strangers meet on a bus heading to their hometown and wake up months later to discover that they're the only people alive. Not only is their city completely abandoned, it's also surrounded by a mysterious black cloud that has swallowed up the rest of the world and is closing in on them. Unsure if they're facing a natural phenomenon or a supernatural event, they venture into the cloud and wind up unleashing a horrific, toothy monster that's intent on chomping them to gory pieces. An independent movie that is beautifully filmed and well cast, *After*

does suffer from being a little talky at times but takes some refreshing twists and turns toward a great reveal at the end.

BODY COUNT: 3

BEST DEATH: Aunt Lu catches on fire

LAST CHANCE LANCE

HIDE AND GO SHRIEK

READY OR NOT

Starring Samara Weaving, Adam Brody and Mark O'Brien

Directed by Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett

Written by Guy Busick and R. Christopher Murphy

Fox Searchlight Pictures

Blushing bride Grace (Samara Weaving) is marrying her beau Alex De Lomas (Mark O'Brien) after dating for only six months, but she thinks she knows what she's getting into: not only is Alex heir to the De Lomas board game fortune, but the union promises her the extended family she craved throughout her childhood as an orphan in foster care. But, as with all fairy-tale weddings, there's a catch – the De Lomas clan has a tradition (read: curse) where new entries must be welcomed (read: hazed) with a familywide parlour game – chosen at random from a mysterious box – on the nuptial night. Woe betide Grace, she's drawn the "Hide and Seek" card; the only game in the deck with a murderous bent. Now, she must survive the night in the De Lomas family mansion while they hunt her, armed with various medieval weaponry. Can she win the life to which she said "I do," or will Alex be a widower before the sun comes up?



To start with the good, *Ready or Not* is a cute concept that's executed with style: the De Lomas estate is lavish and stunning, with meticulous set design and attention to detail. I'm even on board with the heavy-handed allegory to class stratification, where the capitalist ideology of "survival of the fittest" is pushed to an admittedly facile hunting metaphor as Grace must fight for acceptance into the elite. Where the film stumbles is its tone, which flips from deadpan survival horror to cheeky satire/comedy. In the end, *Ready or Not* is a fun, silly movie that makes good on its fun, silly premise. Don't take it too seriously and you'll survive.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

ONE OF US!

FREAKS

Starring Emile Hirsch, Lexy Kolker and Bruce Dern

Written and directed by Adam B. Stein and Zach Lipovsky

Well Go USA

The opening act of *Freaks* plays excellently with expectations, suggesting it's first one kind of story and then another. Even when the basics of the situation become clear, writer/directors Adam Stein and Zach Lipovsky trust the audience's patience and intelligence, refusing to spoon-feed explanations and offering



the pleasure of figuring out connections as the film continues, right through to the end.

When we first meet seven-year-old Chloe (Lexy Kolker), she's living a confined existence in her cluttered suburban home under the anxious eye of her father (*The Autopsy of Jane Doe*'s Emile Hirsch). He's desperate to protect her from undefined but dangerous "bad guys" outside, coaching her to adopt a false identity and telling her, "You need to lie to be normal." But... is he a justifiably concerned dad, or are both he and Chloe victims of his unwarranted paranoia? The answer to that question becomes even more complex when she wanders outside and is taken on a ride by ice-cream-truck driver Mr. Snowcone. The presence of Bruce Dern in this role suggests Mr. Snowcone is not to be trusted, and what he tells Chloe sheds light on her background while also deepening the mystery of her circumstances.

That's just the beginning of Stein and Lipovsky's breathtakingly twisty and well-realized amalgamation of science fiction, horror and father-daughter drama. They play a long game in *Freaks*, staging scenes that at first appear to be dreams or hallucinations, but are ultimately revealed to be crucial to the narrative. Yet *Freaks* isn't just about the gymnastics of its plotting; its beating heart is the remarkable performance by Lexy Kolker (younger sister of *Insidious: The Last Key*'s Ava Kolker). In the midst of the escalating intrigue, Chloe simply – and desperately – wants a family's love, and Kolker and the filmmakers tap deep into her youthful tendency to see things not as they are, but as she'd like them to be. That, as much as the surprising and striking twists and turns, holds your attention straight through to *Freaks*' supremely satisfying ending.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

ONE HELL OF A NIGHT

BURN

Starring Tilda Cobham-Hervey, Josh Hutcherson and Suki Waterhouse
Written and directed by Mike Gan
Entertainment One

Held at gunpoint in the gas station where she works, sad, lonely attendant Melinda (Tilda Cobham-Hervey) is held hostage along with

co-worker Sheila (Suki Waterhouse). Melinda sees a chance to make a friend, but that friend isn't Sheila. Focusing her attention on would-be robber Billy (Josh Hutcherson), she's prepared to do anything for a little human affection. But Melinda is playing an increasingly dangerous game, and one which may have serious consequences for everyone involved.

Writer/director Mike Gan makes the most of his isolated gas station setting and talented, charismatic cast, spinning a dark and unexpected story from the simplest of ingredients. What could have been an ugly straight-to-VOD low-budget thriller bears more

in common (visually) with the neon-bathed 2014 thriller *The Guest* or the work of Nicolas Winding

Refn. With its talky script and impressive lead performances from Hutcherson and Cobham-Hervey, *Burn* is reminiscent of Kevin Smith in his prime – think *Clerks* meets *Misery*.

This makes for an impressive debut from Gan. Darkly funny and wildly unpredictable, *Burn* recalls such character thrillers as *The Loved Ones* and *Cheap Thrills*, and the talented cast are more than up to the task at hand. Especially Cobham-Hervey, whose chillingly lonely Melinda captivates to the end. Her character will seem



Freaks





Ambition

familiar to genre fans, but the writing and acting add several layers that make her a curiously compelling figure. Likewise, the story itself is nothing new, and the deliberate (ahem, slow-burn) pacing occasionally defies patience, but the director keeps his audience on their toes. With this clever, constantly twisting, twisted game of cat-and-mouse, Mike Gan has marked himself as a talent to watch.

JOEL HARLEY

BLACK SWAN SONG

AMBITION

Starring Katherine Hughes, Giles Matthey and Sonoya Mizuno
Written by John Rocco and Jenna Lyn Wright
Directed by Robert Shaye
Shout! Studios

Early and often throughout *Ambition*, its protagonist – the young, aspiring violinist Jude (Katherine Hughes) – is warned about the im-

portance of finding a balance between order and chaos in her life's work. The danger, she's told, is that too much of one or the other will lead to her demise or, at the very least, subpar violin playing. While this dilemma will be familiar to anyone who does creative work for a living, it seems particularly resonant for those who make horror movies. The question of how the time spent carefully setting up believable worlds and characters should compare to time spent tearing through them with gleeful abandon is as old as the genre itself.

While Jude – increasingly obsessed with winning the same fellowship as her legendary, mysteriously deceased classmate Emily (Jordan Salmon) – loses her grip on this order/chaos balance, *Ambition*, directed by New Line Cinema founder Bob Shaye, holds it almost effortlessly. If the thrilling, spoilable final twenty minutes work so well, it's only because *Ambition's* first hour builds such a believable, com-

elling world of characters for Jude to lose touch with, from her roommates Sarah (Sonoya Mizuno) and Veronica (Kyanna Simpson) to her amiable stoner neighbour Steve (Dylan McNamara) and his mysterious, dreamy new tenant Dave (Giles Matthey). In a lesser movie, these characters would remain stereotypes, fodder for an eventual 'in memoriam' reel. However, in the hands of Shaye and screenwriters John Rocco and Jenna Lyn Wright, they're allowed to become

three-dimensional and, when the action eventually heats up, the film is much stronger for it.

While *Ambition's* premise sounds familiar (something like a violinist's *The Red Shoes* or *Black Swan*), it stands as proof that given enough care (or command over order vs. chaos), familiarity can still be engrossing.

PATRICK WOODSTOCK



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Itsy Bitsy

A CREATURE FEATURE WITH HEART

ITSY BITSY

Starring Elizabeth Roberts, Bruce Davison
and Denise Crosby

Directed by Micah Gallo

Written by Micah Gallo, Bryan Dick and Jason Alvino
Scream! Factory

There remains in my black heart a soft spot for the 1950s creature features I watched as a kid. Giant tarantulas, mantises, blobs... I loved them all. But 1954's *Them!* about mutated ants terrorizing the American southwest remains my favourite; not just for its impressive mechanical effects but for its emotional nuance. Similarly, the new big spider movie *Itsy Bitsy* is impressive, not just for its fabulous effects work, but for its

mature approach to really scary stuff like grief, loss and guilt.

Kara (Elizabeth Roberts) is a private nurse with a drug problem who drags her reluctant kids to the country to take a job caring for elderly antiques appraiser Walter Clark (*The Lords of Salem*'s Bruce Davison). Each has their secrets: Kara is trying to medicate away the pain of a lost child, while Walter has used nefarious means to bring back from the jungle an ancient relic, which may also somehow be responsible for his wife's death. And, yes, there is a big spider inside the relic and, yes, it may have a supernatural element and, yes, Kara and her children may be in danger.

First, let's talk about the spider. FX artist Dan

Rebert (*Slither*) and his team have created a truly creepy arachnid, which is mainly an obviously physical prop. (No bad indie film CGI spider here.) That deft physicality gives a real menace to a monster that is not too big and not too damn small either.



Like *Them!*, *Itsy Bitsy* may prove itself rewatchable, not just because of its featured creature, but because its script, co-written by first-time director Micah Gallo, who deftly tackles painful topics not often touched upon in monster movies. The result is a gut-wrenching (and gut-munch-

ing) horror movie that manages to generate both tears and terror.

SEAN PLUMMER



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Art imitates life in **Joe Begos'** rock 'n' roll, semi-autobiographical vampire fever dream

BLOOD IS BLISS

by Michael Gingold

Independent horror filmmaker Joe Begos previously wore his genre-loving heart on his sleeve with the homagistic features *Almost Human* (2013) and *The Mind's Eye* (2015), and now he has spilled more personal concerns onto the screen in neon blue and blood red with *Bliss*. Seeing release in September from Dark Sky Films after tearing up the festival scene (including Montreal's Fantasia, where *Rue Morgue* caught up with Begos), *Bliss* is a visual and aural assault that plugs us directly into the psyche of its drug-addled, bloodthirsting heroine.

Dora Madison stars as Dezzy, an in-your-face painter and party monster struggling to finish a long-overdue project for an impending gallery opening. An especially wild night out leaves her with something much worse than a hangover the next morning: a vampiric craving that becomes one more addiction for her to satisfy. Anxious to get another movie going three years after making *Mind's Eye*, Begos decided to plunge headlong into art-imitates-life territory.

"I wanted to put everything in it, style-wise, that I had done in my last two films, but make it super-personal," he says. "It's essentially about me trying to write and make a movie that ended up becoming *Bliss*; Dezzy is working on a painting that ends up becoming the thing she always wanted to make, so it's a very parallel story. I just felt that seeing her paint would be so much more visual than just watching a guy in the corner of his room, tapping away at his laptop on a screenplay."

In fact, the protagonist was male in Begos' first draft, before he started showing it around for reactions.

"One of my really good friends, [journalist/critic] Jen Yamato, asked, 'Have you thought about making it a female?'" he explains. "When I started thinking about that, it made the story so much more dynamic, even though the structure was essentially the same. It was such an interesting turn, and

the idea evolved over the process of rewriting it."

Like many films about tormented artists, *Bliss* draws a direct line between the indulgences of its protagonist and her creative process. As Begos sees it, the creation of art is itself an addiction, and he admits that he relies on certain artistic "crutches" that he exaggerated in the movie.

"I was smoking a lot of weed, and I would wake up the next day thinking, 'Okay, this is what I want to write,' and I would look at the script and see I had already written it! So it was like I was using these things to help me pursue this process and finish this piece of art, but did I really need that stuff? I didn't know, but I was willing to try it to get this finished, and I wanted to translate that idea to the screen. That's why I decided to make the movie super-hallucinatory and very visual, because you're experiencing the story through her eyes."

To pull the audience into Dezzy's hyped-up, desperate, violent saga, Begos employed bold lighting (by DP Mike Testin, shooting on gritty 16mm) and music (by synth composer Steve Moore, complemented by plenty of hard rock), plus gallons of blood, courtesy of makeup effects artists Josh and Sierra Russell. Holding it all together is Madison's take-no-prisoners performance.

"She's a fucking warrior; no matter what I would call on her to do, she would do it," Begos raves.

But keeping the audience in Dezzy's headspace also entailed eliminating a couple of extraneous scenes at *Bliss*' beginning and end.

"We originally had a prologue and an epilogue that didn't have anything to do with Dezzy," he reveals. "We just felt they didn't work once we had the film cut, and saw where it was going and what it needed to be. So we got rid of them, and now when I watch the movie, I can't believe I even thought we should have those scenes, because it works so well when it begins and ends with Dezzy." 🍷



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RAMROD RETURNS

VICE SQUAD (1982) Blu-ray

Starring Season Hubley, Gary Swanson and Wings Hauser
Directed by Gary Sherman
Written by Sandy Howard, Kenneth Peters
and Robert Vincent O'Neil
Scream Factory

If you can get past the grimy layers of misogyny, racism, and general seediness – or embrace it, even – there's much to admire in Gary Sherman's *Vice Squad*, the story of a prostitute, Princess (Season Hubley), hunted down by seemingly unstoppable maniacal pimp Ramrod (an unforgettable Wings Hauser), with tough vice cop Tom Walsh (Gary Swanson) racing to stop the carnage. Hauser's Ramrod is a force of nature, vile and commanding, whose best moments also crop up on 1984 horror compilation *Terror in the Aisles*, and whom director Sherman confesses is "the greatest monster since Godzilla" in this disc's interview featurette.

Scream Factory has cleaned up the movie with their 4K restoration so well that it practically shines,

showcasing the gorgeous location photography by John Alcott, who does a great job lensing a specific place and time with real flair (e.g., L.A.'s sunset strip in the early '80s), incorporating tons of neon-lit, rain-soaked streets and back alleys, coupled with hard rock pulsing on the soundtrack (Hauser himself provides the vocals on the "Neon Slime" title track). It's as much 1980s Los Angeles mood piece as *The Terminator* (incidentally, Ramrod vs. a T-800 would actually make a fair fight).

The extras are a series of talking heads docs, consisting of lengthy interviews with director Sherman and actors Gary Swanson, Beverly Todd, and Pepe Serna, each clocking in at around an hour in length. These give each subject a chance not just to discuss *Vice Squad*, but reminisce about their lives and careers (Sherman also spends time talking about cult classics *Raw Meat* and *Dead & Buried*), but conspicuously missing are Hauser and Hubley.



The most interesting featurette may be the eleven-minute "Hollywood Streetwalking," a look at the Sunset Strip filming locations that dissolve back and forth from movie clips to the locations today, revealing how much has changed in more than 30 years.

JEFF SZPIRG LAS

LO-FI SCI-FI

FOES (1977) Blu-ray

Starring MacDonald Carey, Alan Blanchard and Gregory Clemens
Written and directed by John Coats
Garagehouse Pictures

In 1977, the year *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* revolutionized screen presentations of space beings, first-time feature filmmaker/special effects artist John Coats turned out an eerie invasion opus more akin to the post-*Night of the Living Dead* cycle of regional horror. I recall reading about *Foes* in a British sci-fi magazine as a kid in the late '70s, and wondering what happened to it; this year, it's Garagehouse Pictures to the rescue.

Foes, previously seen stateside only in scattered early-'80s TV broadcasts, takes place largely on an island off the California coast – a starkly picturesque location (beautifully shot by director of photography Michael Sabo) and perfect setting for this story. When a UFO appears

in the sky overhead after taking out a fighter jet, a lighthouse keeper and his wife (Coats and Jane Wiley), and a pair of visiting scuba divers (Alan Blanchard and Gregory Clemens), find themselves at the mercy of alien forces. Every so often, the movie switches to a scientist (TV vet MacDonald Carey) and assorted military types dealing with the threat, in scenes that feel disconnected from the island action.

Coats' commentary on Garagehouse's Blu-ray reveals a reason why: these segments were ordered by UK distributor Brent Walker to pad out the running time and fill in the expository blanks of the writer/director's elliptical story. Though the talk track is sporadic, Coats shares sufficient notes on the production, with an unsurprising emphasis on the impressive low-cost effects – plus a great anecdote about Orson Welles – to make it worth a listen. Also supporting the grainy, atmospheric and well-mastered 1.85:1 transfer is Coats' equally gritty, far less fanciful black-and-white short *Tales of L.A.* and a fine assortment of behind-the-scenes photos. *Foes* may be microbudget, but watching it, you won't be surprised that Coats and members of his crew went on to long, Oscar- and Emmy-winning VFX careers.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

A SOUR PUSS

THE UNCANNY (1977) Blu-ray

Starring Donald Pleasence, Joan Greenwood
and Susan Penhaligon
Directed by Denis Héroux
Written by Michel Parry
Severin Films

For every *Creepshow* and *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, the graveyard of horror anthologies is littered with failures, and this CanCon entry sits on the median of what could've been a wholly fun shocker packed with aging U.S. and British stars, and a dud hampered by Denis Héroux's indifferent direction and a lazy script by Michel Parry (*Xtro*).

The wraparound story has conspiracy author Wilbur (Peter Cushing) detailing three mysterious cases to convince his deeply cynical publisher Frank (a bored Ray Milland) that humanity's very survival depends on spreading the gospel that *Cats Are Evil*. *London 1912*, the first tale, has the nephew of Miss Malkin (Joan Greenwood) scheming with the maid Janet (Susan Penhaligon) to destroy a recently revised will so the estate isn't left to a mass of furry fiends. The oft-told tale involving a miffed, murderous heir allows for some memorably grisly fun, but much of the story has bloodied, starving Janet trapped in a pantry while the chatty felines wait patiently beyond the door.

Quebec Province 1975 sees orphan Lucy (Katrina Holden Bronson) using witchery to teach cousin Angela a lesson when the Blake household is determined to kill Lucy's cat. While Angela uses accidents and disruptions to put a wedge between her unwanted cousin and the family, bad dubbing and generic voicing robs already stale performances of any gravitas, especially Alexandra Stewart (*Mickey One*), who plays Lucy's dim auntie.

The cast in *Hollywood 1936* probably had a lot of fun slumming in this deliberately cheeky tale in which star Valentine "VD" De'ath (Donald Pleasence) replaces his freshly bisected wife and

leading lady with lover Edina (Samantha Eggar), while John Vernon bulldozes through scenes as a cigar-chomping Austro-Hungarian director.

Severin's solid transfer of a worn but decent print is boosted by an interview with Penhaligon, and while hardly a masterpiece of frissons, *The Uncanny* is a worthy addition to one's CanCon and pseudo-Hammer libraries.

MARK R. HASAN

HOUSE OF LAX

THE WAX MASK (1997) Blu-ray

Starring Robert Hossein, Romina Mondello
and Riccardo Serventi Longhi
Directed by Sergio Stivaletti
Written by Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and Daniele Stroppa
Severin

Argento and Fulci – together at last? That's what was promised by *The Wax Mask*, the pair's only intended collaboration, but it was not to be – by the time the two titans of Italian horror finally agreed to pool their talents, their best days were behind them. Rather than a much-needed turning point in one of Italian horror's less distinguished periods, *The Wax Mask* struggles to fully come to life.

Based on the same story as *House of Wax* (1953) and following that film's general trajectory, *The Wax Mask* was intended to as a directorial comeback for Fulci, who was replaced by FX artist Sergio Stivaletti when he unexpectedly passed away in 1996. In the film, costume designer Sonia (Romina Mondello)

takes a job at a waxworks, owned and operated by Boris Volkoff (Robert Hossein), just as Paris is terrorized by a trenchcoat-clad killer who jabs an elaborate hypodermic needle into the neck of his victims. A news reporter (Riccardo Serventi Longhi), and a police inspector (Gianni Franco) both suspect the attacks have something to do with the unusually realistic wax figures and detailed recreations displayed in Volkoff's creepy establishment.

Once rarely seen, *The Wax Mask* still managed to scare up something of a cult following thanks to its Eurolease approach – the generous dollops of nudity and gore easily eclipse Stivaletti's meagre attempts at building tension or staging expository scenes. Plagued by shamelessly poor English dubbing and unfortunate CGI effects, the film mostly plays out as a mixed bag of giallo tropes and classic horror tributes until the finale, which takes an unexpected and absurd turn towards sci-fi strangeness.

Severin's 4K restoration brings the film's luridly colourful scenes to life and they've packed this disc with an amazing array of extras – more than two hours of featurettes touching on every aspect of production, plus behind-the-scenes footage. An included interview with writer Alan Jones helps make a case for the film, but it's hard to consider *The Wax Mask* anything more than a curiosity piece; an imperfect replica of the past terrors that made both Argento and Fulci some of the biggest names in the genre.

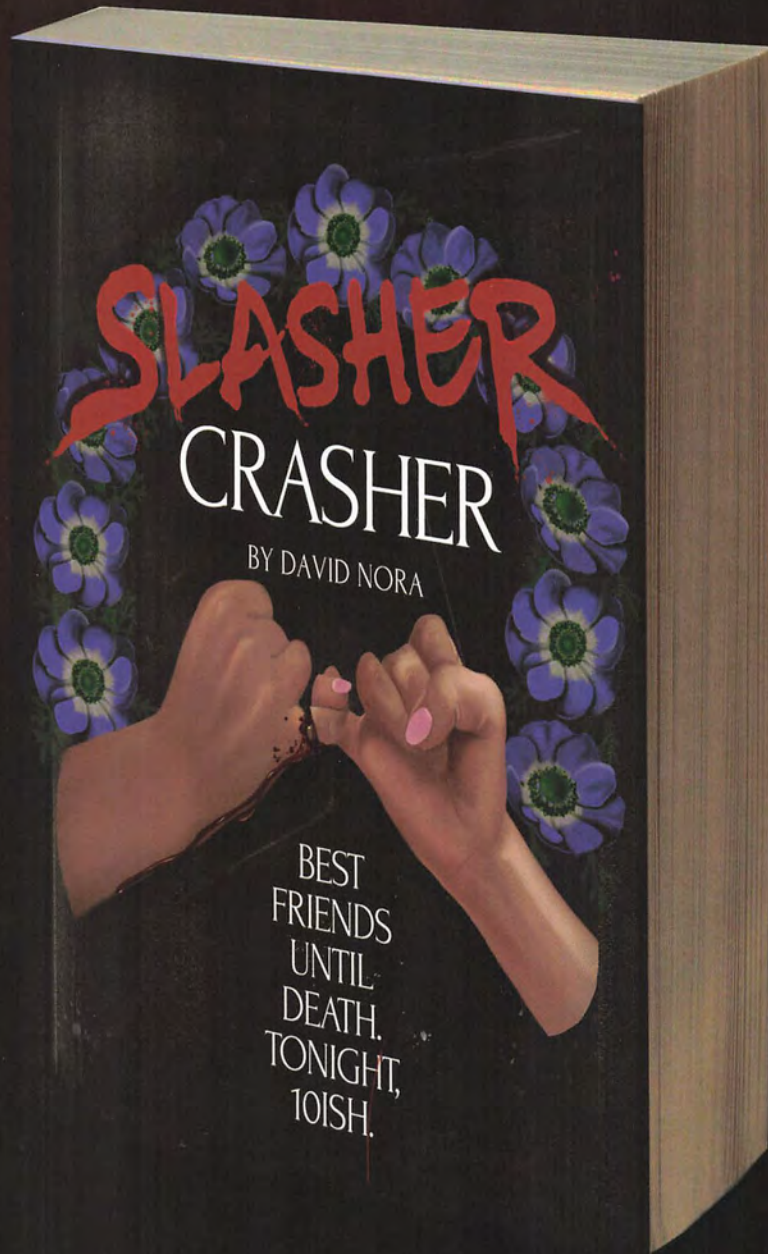
PAUL CORUPE



The Uncanny



GOOD FINAL GIRLS CHOP HEADS.
BAD FINAL GIRLS GIVE...
THE FINGER.



DAVIDNORAJR X AVAILABLE ON AMAZON X SUPPORT INDY AUTHORS

IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

You've Been
Warned
by John W. Bowen

Factoid: I fucking hate *The Conjuring*, not to mention its vomitous litter of sequels, prequels, spinoffs and fuckoffs. It's overwrought, clichéd drivel and I'm genuinely baffled that so many otherwise rational folk actually seem to dig it. What did you people do, ingest some critical-assessment-suppressing miracle drug?

So why suddenly spew all this venom over a film released six years ago? Well, because I've just discovered *The Conjuring's* all-but-forgotten ancestor. And it's worse. Much, much worse; so much so it's actually worth watching. *The Haunted*, a 1991 made-for-TV movie, recently showed up on Shudder without so much as a footnote of explanation or warning. Given my longstanding fondness for the oft-maligned Movie of the Week canon and the presence of some well-respected actors including Sally Kirkland and Jeffrey DeMunn, *The Haunted* seemed to promise a pleasant diversion – I just didn't realize which kind.

An opening title crawl crows that "The following is a dramatization of actual experiences," which is easy enough to believe because DeMunn and Kirkland play a couple named Jack and Janet Smuri; screenwriters don't usually come up with anything like "Smuri" except maybe as a Don Martin sound effect, so we simply *must* believe, right? Summer of 1975: the insufferably average and wholesome Smuri clan moves into a run-down fixer-upper, but before they're halfway settled in, things start going paranormally cattywumpus. Initially, Janet's concerns over self-slaming doors, disembodied voices and misplaced rolls of tape are patriarchyally poopooed in classic fashion by her husband ("With all the carpools and the church groups and the club meetings, you are running yourself ragged!"), but he finally gets with

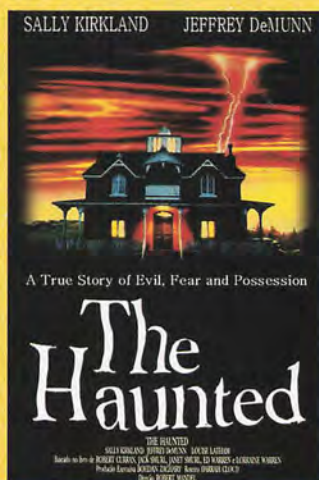


the program when they both get ghost-groped in bed one night. His temporary solution? "Let's both sleep on my side of the bed." If this sounds like shitty writing to you, it's scarcely an hors d'oeuvre before the banquet of bad that lies ahead, so go get your stretchiest buffet pants on.

The manifestations continue to escalate; like any rational beings, the Smurfs' first instinct is to summon their priest. He accepts their dinner invitation and, after being told of their predicament, suggests they attend his parish's Wednesday night marriage counselling group. ("It's very popular, but I think I can make room for you.") After much imploring and beseeching from his harried hosts, the minister reluctantly agrees to go and "say a blessing in every room and if there is a (*condescending pause*) presence in the house, that ought to get rid of it." (The kids, incidentally, are watching a *Three Stooges* episode while this tableau plays out; I'm assuming some ironic effect was intended but can't imagine the filmmakers were shooting for anything quite so dead-on.) Father Fuckwit wanders about the joint muttering prayers, sprinkling holy water and suffering what appears to be a mild

anxiety attack. "If anything else happens here," he says before beating a sweaty retreat into the night, "call me." The Smurfs figure that's that; they have a glass of wine and call it a night. At which point, naturally, things get exponentially worse, and not just the writing. Black blobs float around, light fixtures explode while people sing "Amazing Grace," Jack gets raped by a succubus, etc.

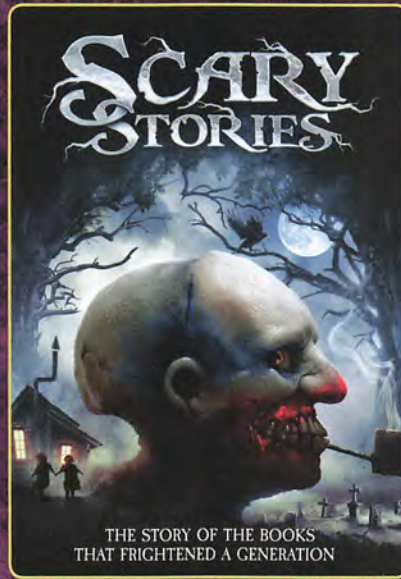
But there is hope! Guess who just happens to be in town to lecture at a local college? Real-life celebrity polter-shysters Ed and Lorraine Warren, later portrayed by Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga in the *Conjuring* franchise, essayed here by Stephen Markle and Diane Baker. The Warrens come over for tea and pastries and medium Lorraine spots a few wandering spirits; accordingly, the Warrens and Smurfs say the Lord's Prayer while organ music plays on a cassette deck (which Ed solemnly turns off after "Amen"). Then the Warrens bugger off to their next gig while spirits continue fucking shit up at Chez Smuri. Another priest is summoned, rites are performed, media is alerted, media circus ensues. Then the Sacred Heart League shows up to sing hymns and hand out candles *and...* it all stops. Not the haunting, just the movie. A title crawl gives us the rundown on what happened after that. The story's not actually over, just the film. Man, time constraints can be a bitch, huh? No fanfare, just over-and-out. Not unlike suddenly being told to get the hell out of someone's basement. Sucks, doesn't it? 🍷



THE NEWEST & GNARLIEST HORROR, CULT, & NOIR



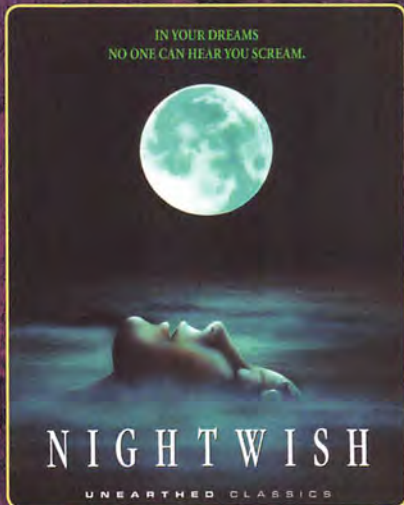
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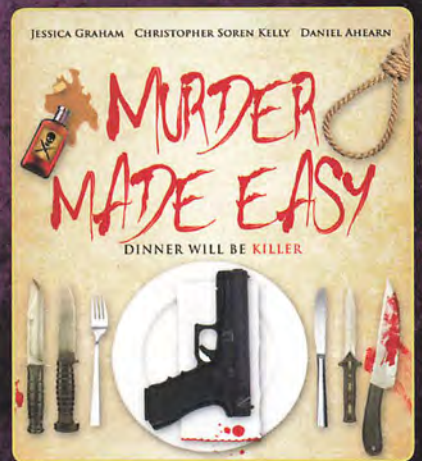
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FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Satanic Panic

"PERHAPS THE SATANIC PANIC'S MOST NOTABLE EFFECT ON HORROR FILMS WAS TO PROVIDE A NEW SOURCE OF INSPIRATION."

While Satan is no stranger to the movie screen, having made onscreen appearances as far back as the silent era, it wasn't until much later that Old Scratch was accused of working behind the scenes as well. In the 1980s, unfounded fears about a clandestine network of devil worshippers saw concerned Christian groups blame popular culture for implanting demonic and occult ideas in the minds of impressionable youths. This movement, which has since been dubbed the Satanic Panic, focused on heavy metal music and role-playing games as particularly wicked influences, but the horror film industry didn't entirely escape notice. At the same time as video rental stores began to spring up across the nation, prominent crusaders railed against some widely available fright films even as their fire-and-brimstone antics inspired a new crop of theatrical horror releases.

Spearheaded by once-acclaimed Christian figures such as Bob Larson and Mike Warnke, the Satanic Panic was fuelled by outlandish – and since discredited – tales about torture, blood sacrifice and cannibalism by people who professed to be former high-ranking Satanists. As alarm bells were raised by everything from *Michelle Remembers*, a 1980 paperback best-seller describing a victim's memories of satanic ritual abuse, to Geraldo Rivera's 1988 TV special *Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground*, parents increasingly feared that the Devil was harvesting souls through popular culture. Crusaders directly called out occult imagery on album covers and music videos, and went in search of "backmasked" messages that could only be heard when records were played in reverse. Depictions of magic and Eastern religions was also seen as a conduit for satanic influence, resulting in *Dungeons & Dragons* games and Saturday morning cartoons being banned from many homes.

While organized religion has frequently been at odds with Hollywood's motion picture industry, earlier horror films played an undisclosed role in the beginnings of the Satanic Panic movement. Not only did *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976) appear to provide inspiration for many claims by former Satanic High Priests, some critics have pointed out that certain rituals depicted in *Michelle Remembers* are clearly based on those seen in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Of course, that didn't stop proponents from con-



demning these same films – not only do satanic horror movies help normalize evil beliefs, these people argued, but certain scenes are regularly imitated by viewers as a gateway to participating in actual black masses.

The attacks on these films, as well as others that were targeted throughout the decade, were often misinformed. Christian fundamentalist videos such as *Pagan Invasion* and *Satanism Unmasked* claimed that horror film productions regularly invited witches and Satanists to act as technical advisors to ensure authentic depictions of spells, rituals and sacrifices. The host of one video was horrified to see the wide availabil-

ity of VHS copies of *Faces of Death* even though it was "banned in 46 countries" – not realizing this bogus claim was simply a marketing stunt by a film loaded with faked snuff footage. Though not directly connected to the Satanic Panic, the 1980s saw Mary Whitehouse lead a similar moral charge against explicit horror films in the UK. It was her claims that led to the "video nasty" classification that banned certain films that were deemed likely to "deprave or corrupt."

But perhaps the Satanic Panic's most notable effect on horror films was to provide a new source of inspiration. As the decade wore on, viewers were treated to a rash of heavy metal-themed horror movies that riffed off of the tall tales embraced by the movement. Most notably, 1986's *Trick or Treat* has a teenager – after playing his record backwards – accidentally unleash the ghost of a vengeful rock star who attempts to murder his high school classmates. Similarly, *Black Roses* (1988) has demons who pose as a rock band that changes kids into evil monsters with their music, while *The Gate* (1987) focuses in part on a heavy metal album that contains hidden instructions on how to open a portal to Hell.

Since then, many of the wild claims and horror stories that became part of Satanic Panic lore have been debunked as highly exaggerated or outright hoaxes. But if parents were once terrified that the Devil himself was lurking in every LP record groove or VHS rental box, ready to take away their children, then horror filmmakers were more than happy to run with the concept and reflect those cultural fears back to them. In the end, films like *Trick or Treat* were already aware that if anything about the Satanic Panic was truly scary, it was the actions of those who so readily believed it was really happening. ☠

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Since its founding in 2016, Vault Comics has emerged as one of the most creative and innovative publishers on the market. With great success in the areas of science fiction and fantasy, Vault is now turning its attention to horror with Nightfall, an annual fall event that will launch a select number of terrifying titles.

The first release to premiere under the new banner will be *The Plot* written by Michael Moreci and Tim Daniel, and drawn by Joshua Hixson. Daniel, also Vault's E.V.P. of Branding and Design, sees Nightfall as an organic evolution of the company's commitment to tell stories that challenge both creators and readers to break out of the ordinary.

"Nightfall is our little red balloon of horror, and we want it to be elastic," he says. "Having some degree of steerage on Nightfall has allowed Mike, Joshua, and I to really focus on the story without imposed limits. There are influences both Mike and I share, and we've always worn those on our sleeve, but guiding our efforts has been less about what will 'work' to launch Nightfall and more about the editorial input from

Vault Editor-in-Chief, Adrian Wassel. He is giving our story the same care and attention as the science fiction and fantasy tales we've told through Vault for the past two years."

In *The Plot*, Chase Blaine becomes the reluctant guardian of his niece and nephew when his estranged brother and sister-in-law are murdered. Chase moves himself and the kids to his ancestral home in Cape Augusta, which happens to overlook a deep, black bogland. Soon, family secrets start oozing to the surface – along with other assorted odds and ends.

For Moreci, this book strikes a very personal chord; having struggled with hereditary illness in his family, the writer has used *The Plot* to tap into his own anxieties and fears.

"There's something diseased about this family," he reveals. "And while the direct source of the disease is something truly horrifying, what's worse is how it's impacted so many lives and relationships for so many years. That, to me, is where the best horror comes from – in what I think of as the ghastly mundane. Writing about it has been really emotional for me because it's so close, and so personal. But it's been good to get it out of my system as well; cathartic, even. And the results, on the page, are a mixture of the terror I feel and know and the beauty in letting some of it go."

But not all the terrors will be metaphysical. After all, the book does take place near a bog, and though the authors admit there aren't the usual things in this swamp, it's far from empty.

"Will we have swamp monsters? No," says Daniel. "Are we swamp adjacent? Yes! We've got a deep, dark bog and from that bog comes something very horrific yet very corporeal that has been troubling our Blaine family for generations. The question is, why?"

While readers ponder that question, the Vault



The Plot: The terrifying debut release under Vault Comics' new Nightfall banner.

team will be waiting to see if Nightfall and *The Plot* will continue the company's upward trajectory.

"Naturally, we'd love for *The Plot* to be as widely embraced as possible," says Daniel. "Shoot, I'll say it – I want it to be the biggest selling horror title of 2019 and do for horror comics what Image's *Infidel* or *Gideon Falls* did in 2018. That kind of success would give our subsequent titles a real boost in terms of reader confidence and adoption."

For more information on *The Plot* and Vault Comics, visit www.vaultcomics.com.

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO



QUICK CUTS

I've mentioned before that I find *Alien* comics challenging, in that most of them tend to be familiar riffs on either the first or second film in the franchise. This usually results in competent but somewhat stale retreads and unfortunately, *Aliens: Dust to Dust* clings to what's come before with face-hugger intensity. Once again, we have an outerworld colony overrun by xenomorphs; once again, a small group of survivors try desperately to get off the planet; once again, we see dark, hostile environments filled with inclement weather; and once again, there's a "surprise" android reveal. There's one interesting twist, however: early in the story, twelve-year-old Maxon's mother becomes the victim of a chestbuster, which then leads to a full-grown xenomorph that exhibits odd and protective behaviour towards the boy. Is this simply a misperception on the part of the survivors or has the alien adopted maternal instincts from its host? It's *Dust to Dust*'s most intriguing aspect, and a sadly underdeveloped one.



When imaginary friends turn monstrous and deadly, it's time to call in the FBI's IMP division! And so, Special Agents Virgil Crockett and Melba Li travel to Maiden Springs, Kentucky, on the hunt for IMPs – Interdimensional Mental Parasites. Accompanying the agents is Polly Peachpit, a spidery and always-hungry phantom only visible to Li. The two share a special bond – when she was ten years old, Melba's seemingly imaginary friendship with Polly resulted in the little girl viciously stabbing one of



her classmates. Now the agents hope Polly can shed light on a string of child disappearances in the small town, which could be the result of Polly's monster nemesis, Charlie Chokecherry, or something even more sinister. A great premise that is sometimes hampered by Seeley's need to halt the narrative for background info-dumps; a rather bland way to present readers with answers to the many intriguing questions raised throughout the story. Thankfully, these moments soon give way to plenty of visceral craziness on the part of the visually inspired and grotesque monsters.

In 1920s Harlem, the Sangerye family continue a long tradition of monster hunting, which is fortuitous as the proverbial shit is about the hit the fan. Commonly dealing with



creatures such as the Jinoo – humans whose souls have been tainted by hate and bodies hideously transformed – the family must now contend with a new, mysterious breed of monsters who also spread their infection to others. Horror has always been a great platform to tackle society's ills head-on, and *Bitter Root* continues this tradition with its biting look at the African-American experience in the US. That it supplements its insight with a highly likeable and diverse cast of characters, a rich mythology, and plenty of monster thumping is a credit to David F. Walker, Chuck Brown and Sanford Greene. Highly recommended.



Made a bad deal with the Devil? Are you or a loved one facing a one-way ticket to Hell? Who you gonna call? *The Exorsisters*! Cate and Kate Harrow will stare down demons, smack evil spirits, and shove pitchforks where the sun don't shine. The only thing they can't handle is their mother – an overbearing opportunist whose amateur dabbling with the occult cost Cate her soul when she was a little girl. By the time she got it back years later, the soul had morphed into its own, distinct personality: Kate. Together again (yet still apart) the two "sisters" must coexist while saving the world from the upcoming apocalypse. Quirky and

fun, *The Exorsisters* tells its story with style, wit and a healthy dose of ingenuity. Though there are more laughs than chills, plenty of sundry hellspawned creatures give our girls trouble, including one of the most fiendish menaces in existence: the ex-boyfriend.

Mike Blackburn, a professional pathfinder from Earth, finds himself a prisoner on a remote, off-world colony. Busting loose, he hooks up with a local dissident, Grace Moody, and together they run a deadly gauntlet to reach Mike's escape craft located in the aptly named Cemetery Beach. Author Warren

Ellis isn't too concerned with plot intricacies as the story moves at breakneck speed from one deadly encounter to the next – rather, it's all about establishing the mood of the colony setting, nicknamed "Giant Toilet Planet." And this is something he does well, throwing an endless barrage of horrific obstacles at our heroes: hostile climates, sinister government officials, organ-stealing locals, explosive spitting tanks and aircraft, labyrinthine sewers, savage bionic mutants, and the odd dog with a gas mask. Ellis and artist Jason Howard also throw in plenty of black humour, visual gags, and over-the-top gore to assure the reader that tongue should be planted firmly in cheek at all times. 🍷



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BOOKS

HALLOWEEN:
THE CHANGING SHAPE OF AN ICONIC SERIESErnie Magnotta
CreateSpace

While reams of material has been written about John Carpenter's landmark 1978 film (and its many sequels), Ernie Magnotta's self-published volume accomplishes something rather noteworthy: regardless of the place the franchise holds in your heart, *Halloween: The Changing Shape of an Iconic Series* will make you want to revisit it.

Magnotta has done a superb job at laying out his book in a logical and concise fashion. He goes

through each film in the franchise methodically, providing a plot summary; character analysis; notes on any changes to Myers' iconic mask; an examination of the suspense and scares, cinematography, music direction, and themes; and finally, budget info, box office tallies, and excerpts of reviews from the

film's release, before offering up his own no-nonsense evaluation. This system allows readers to easily follow the author as he compares each film's successes and failures, even if they haven't seen all the installments. The book also boasts a healthy bibliography, and frequently sees Magnotta using the writers he cites to back up his arguments, which not only gives them extra weight, but has the unexpected side effect of making one want to seek out some of those books as well. While it might have been nice to see more large photos in *Halloween: The Changing Shape of an Iconic Series*, the smaller ones have been chosen with purpose and often reference a particular character, theme or plot point discussed in the text.

Avoiding most of the common pitfalls of self-publishing, Magnotta's oversized volume is hard to put down, in no small part due to the author's accessible and thoughtful style. So whether you're a diehard devotee of the *Halloween* franchise, a fan of good film analysis, or only know the movies from the Rob Zombie remakes (sacrilege!), *Halloween:*

The Changing Shape of an Iconic Series will help you sound smarter at parties. Buy it.

BRENTON BENTZ

GROWING THINGS

Paul Tremblay
William Morrow

We're now past the midway point of 2019 and Paul Tremblay's powerhouse 2018 novel *The Cabin at the End of the World* is still racking up awards and accolades. If you can't get enough of this rising star of horror fiction, the good news is that his latest short story collection, *Growing Things*, is loaded with the kind of uncertain, atmospheric, and outright terrifying tales for which he's become known.

Growing Things is bookended by a pair of stories that recall Tremblay's 2015 novel *A Head Full of Ghosts*. The titular tale, which kicks off the book, preceded that novel by five years and eventually became part of it, while the final tale, "The Thirteenth Temple," offers a sort of "sequel" to the events of the book, allowing us one more glimpse into Merry's adult life.

Tremblay's work is full of ambiguity, something he ribs himself about in the somewhat self-referential "Note from the Dog Walkers." It's a story that's hard to read due to its wall-of-text, no-paragraph-breaks style, but ultimately pays off when its "notes to the dog's owner" format sees the employees confessing to more and more invasive, obsessive and disturbing behaviours. Tremblay takes an experimental approach in other tales as well, particularly "Further Questions for the Somnambulist," which forgoes a traditional storytelling approach for pages of carefully organized questions.

There are a few moments where it could be argued that Tremblay is a bit *too* ambiguous, but that's a minor complaint for a collection that grabs you by the neck and drags you deep into its weird world, where a hungry monster dwells on the edge of town and folks can disappear into thin air. If nothing else, *Growing Things* further cements Tremblay's reputation as a versatile writer who can conjure up chills in both the short and long formats. So, if one

of his novels or collections hasn't yet found its way to your to-be-read pile yet, that requires immediate correction.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

SONG FOR THE UNRAVELING
OF THE WORLDBrian Evenson
Coffee House Press

Readers of Brian Evenson's previous collection, *A Collapse of Horses* (RM#166), are well prepared for an author who bases his effects on ambiguity,

uncertainty and suggestion, creating an unknowable cosmos that easily shrinks to the point of a claustrophobic microcosm. The motto of his latest collection, from a poem by David Winters, announces something similar: "The world itself withdraws like a tide, / uncovering a widening gap / which consciousness unfolds to fill..." The "objective" reality in these tales is easily shattered and the world revealed as a dark place lit only by our frail psyches. No wonder that the stories collected here, from various mainstream and genre magazines and anthologies, abound with unreliable

narrators, paranoia and open endings.

Some are clearly Lovecraftian, as "Lord of the Vats," about summoning Yog Sothoth on an intergalactic spaceship, and "Glasses," re-imagining the classic trope of seeing too much through the cracks in the world, and being seen as well. Others break down the difference between reality and cinematic fiction: "Room Tone," "Line of Sight," and "Lather of Flies" all deal with characters whose obsessions with film lead them into some strange borderlands.

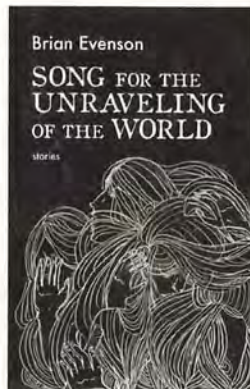
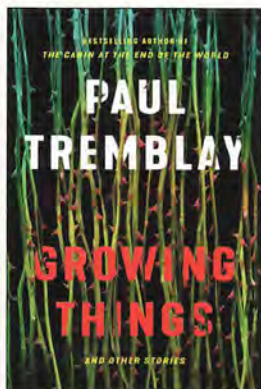
Other people are unknowable (like "Menno," about a paranoid convinced that a neighbour is taking stuff from his apartment); the universe is strange and illogical (as in "The Second Door," where two siblings can choose between a door to an alien world, and another leading to a much more terrifying place); and, worst of all, one's own self is a mystery (as in the titular tale, about a man who abducts his daughter from his estranged wife, but isn't certain afterwards if he has anything to do with her disappearance). The world unravels, from whichever standpoint you look at it.

Equal parts challenging and frustrating, these stories are the closest literary equivalent to the later work of David Lynch that you're likely to find. They're just as chilling, too.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

HALLOWEEN
THE CHANGING SHAPE OF AN ICONIC SERIES

ERNIE MAGNOTTA



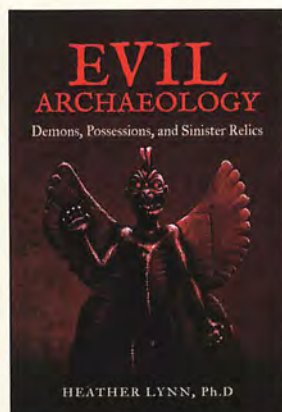


Evil Archaeology: The Exorcism of Emily Rose.

EVIL ARCHAEOLOGY: DEMONS, POSSESSIONS, AND SINISTER RELICS

Heather Lynn
Disinformation

There's nothing evil about archaeology, but the titular phrase is catchy enough to cover the creepy ground that this book explores. From Pazuzu, demon of the southwestern wind in Assyrian and Babylonian mythology and immortalized in *The Exorcist*, through the Jewish dybbuk and Arabic jinn, all the way to the "demon" that allegedly possessed Anneliese Michel (as fictionalized in 2005's *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*), *Evil Archaeology* offers a crash course in demonology.



Demons, possessions, and exorcisms take up the bulk of the book, including the medieval craze that inspired Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971) and the real-life story behind William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971), but there are archaeological horrors, too: the elongated skulls of Mesoamerica, ritual human sacrifice of the Aztecs and the Mayas, the Celtic burning effigies (as seen in 1973's *The Wicker Man*), etc. There are also snippets about haunted places and cursed objects (including Annabelle-like dolls).

That's all very inspiring to the novices, but the brief chapters may be too sketchy for those hoping to, um, dig deeper. The PhD-bearing author describes herself as "a renegade archaeologist" who "left a life in academia to pursue her fascination with the unexplained." While this approach may appeal to some,

the author should've sent parts of the book to a paranormal magazine, instead: namely, a lengthy reader email with a personal account of a "demonic possession." There's also an interview with a paranormal investigator and "ghostorian," and another with "a renowned exorcist and spiritual deliverance minister" who claims: "Yes, I have seen victims levitate, speak in other languages, and shape-shift!"

The insights offered aren't very deep ("the evil we see in sinister relics is really just a reflection of the evil we fear in ourselves"), but if you want a popular digest of themes that have nourished the horror genre for centuries, *Evil Archaeology* is a solid stepping stone in that direction.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

DANTE'S PICK



WILL MY CAT EAT MY EYEBALLS?

Caitlin Doughty
Norton

Do you have a morbid streak? Do you love a good factoid? Did you give an enthusiastic yes in response to both those questions? Well, dear reader, in that case, let me introduce you to your new favourite book: author and mortician Caitlin Doughty's *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?* And please, while I know you can read that subtitle – *Big Questions from Tiny Mortals about Death* – don't be foolish enough to think you already know everything within its pages just because you're a grown-up; I can assure you that you don't. How do I know?

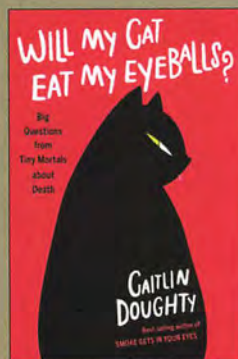
Well, I was the Weird Facts and Morbid Stats girl at this fine establishment for more than a decade and there's a wealth of fascinating stuff in these 222 pages that even I hadn't stumbled across in ten years of purposely seeking out the dark, disturbing, and icky. Need an example? In this era of overbooked flights, if a person croaks in the seat next to you, chances are they're going to stay seated there for the duration of the trip (though an attendant might be kind enough to drape a blanket over them).

Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs? is not one of those books that's written down for a young audience. It's full of big words and real science and doesn't shy away from appropriately squelchy descriptions – something that would have been inherently disappointing when detailing the specifics of decomposition and dying in the vacuum of space, etc. Doughty's style is both witty and conversational, and she often includes small personal asides to the reader, meaning the book is never weighed down by its otherwise heavy subject matter.

Some of the questions the kids pose (yes, they all came from real children) are simplistic or kind of silly, but it's a testament to Doughty that her answers never are. Instead, she uses those questions to move in a slightly different, often less explored direction.

Whether you cohabit with a death-curious youngster or harbour such inclinations yourself, Doughty's book will thrill and chill. Personally, I'm keeping it around for when my daughter starts asking me about these things, because *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?* tackles the dark stuff better than I ever could.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



MONSTER, SHE WROTE UNCOVERS THE HALF-FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF
HORROR FICTION'S PIONEERING LADIES

MOTHERS OF FRIGHT

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER



THE LONG AND STORIED HISTORY OF CHILLING TALES INCLUDES MANY TALENTED WOMEN, but you wouldn't necessarily know that since the work of these writers often failed to be preserved in the same manner as that of their male counterparts. Whether a side effect of our patriarchal society or the nature of the publications in which these women's stories appeared, early contributors to horror and speculative fiction such as Margaret Cavendish, Regina Maria Roche, Charlotte Darce, Charlotte Riddell, and Margaret Oliphant are far from familiar to most readers. Yet, if you go looking for them, as Melanie R. Anderson and Lisa Kröger have in their new book *Monster, She Wrote* (out Sep. 17 from Quirk), they're there, along with countless others, just waiting to be rediscovered.

"A lot of these women's fiction was lost because they were writing genre or pulp fiction, which was notoriously printed on cheap paper that just didn't stand up to the test of time," says Kröger. "But there was also a bit of patriarchal bias in the scholarship that followed. This is getting better, but for a while, white men were the ones being canonized by scholars. For instance, Charles Dickens' writing is well preserved, but Elizabeth Gaskell – who wrote alongside him... and just as well, I might add – is not as often anthologized."

Anderson continues: "We [also] note in *Monster, She Wrote*, that genre fiction is often lost to us, partially because it's seen as fluff fiction read by the masses without larger thematic messages. Even though genre fiction speaks to what is going on in a society at the time, many academics historically undervalued this work in favour of 'high-brow' literature 'complex' enough to be studied."

While this is true, genre scholarship has evolved considerably over the last 50 years, and at the present time there's a groundswell of interest in revisiting, cataloguing, and studying our genre's less celebrated literary forebears. This is exactly what *Monster, She Wrote* does, but similar to Grady Hendrix's *Paperbacks From Hell* (2017), it's packaged in an engaging, easily digestible format. The book provides overviews of each period, from "The Founding Mothers" of the 1600s through to the 2000s with "The Future of Horror and Speculative

Fiction," without ever getting too bogged down in academic minutia.

The book was an idea long in the making for Kröger and Anderson, who first met in graduate school when they were both teaching and working on dissertations on women writers. They went on to co-edit two collections of academic essays together (one of which focused on the work of Shirley Jackson), before deciding to take their passion to a more mainstream publisher and project. Since their specialities fell in different areas – for Kröger it was Gothic fiction, while Anderson studied later works – it made dividing the workload of *Monster, She Wrote* a no-brainer.

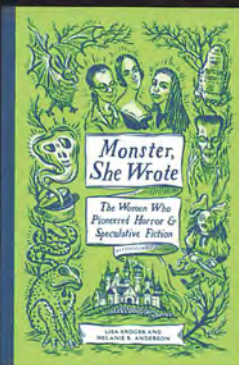
Though both authors were already fans of many of the writers beforehand, there was still digging to be done. Anderson got into the habit of paying close attention to books' introductions and notes from editors; Kröger had other tricks.

"When researching their personal lives, we tried to stay as close to the subject's time period as possible," she says. "Some of these women had autobiographies, but sometimes we had to get creative by reading letters or newspaper and magazine articles of the day. Of course, library databases are also an invaluable resource."

And now so is *Monster, She Wrote*, which presents its female history of horror chronologically, spotlighting major authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Shirley Jackson, Angela Carter, V.C. Andrews and Anne Rice in multi-page chapters that frequently conclude with "Not To Be Missed," "Also Try," and "Related Works," all offering further reading suggestions.

As informative and overdue as *Monster, She Wrote* is, the authors do have a few regrets.

"There were so many writers we wanted to include but couldn't!" exclaims Kröger. "Sometimes we had to cut writers because we couldn't find enough research on them, which was heartbreaking. But more often than not, we had to cut writers simply because of space. We wanted to keep the book readable, so the length needed to be manageable. But that's the beauty about *Monster, She Wrote*: it's just a beginning point. No one can say that women don't write dark genre fiction after seeing this book." 🧛



THE LAST CHRISTMAS

F. Paul Wilson
Gauntlet Press

In F. Paul Wilson's latest *Repairman Jack* installment, we catch up with our favourite anti-hero about a year after his last fix during *Ground Zero* in New York City. Not only did the previous job leave the usual wake of collateral damage and suffering bad guys, but this time it left Jack with a few less family members. As a result, he's all but ready to throw in the towel on a career of fixing other people's problems. Sure, folks getting hurt was always his trademark, but usually they deserved it and he always got the job done.



Now in a major slump, self-doubt has replaced any motivation for Jack to get back in the game, but when his old contact Burke puts him in touch with a couple of scientists who need help locating and capturing a strange hybrid creature they claim escaped during transport to the zoo, Jack is counting on a simple fix to ease him back into the job.

Of course, nothing is ever simple in Jack's world, and soon he's hunting down a mutated beast that shouldn't exist, while also being chased by a couple of hired guns sent to fetch some ancient artifact that he'd agreed to protect for a mysterious woman. And, if that's not enough to contend with, there's an end-of-the-world element at the centre of it all.

With surgical-level precision, Wilson fuses realism, suspense and dialogue worth eavesdropping on with a boundless palette of plot twists and thrilling adventure. Despite the sense of finality in its title, readers of *The Last Christmas* will likely keep hoping Jack goes on fixing what's wrong with the world well into twilight, and the darkness to follow.

RICK HIPSON

THE SATURDAY NIGHT GHOST CLUB

Craig Davidson
Penguin

If you're still riding the high of 1980s nostalgia that's been tearing through our genre the last few years, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club* – the latest novel from Craig Davidson – has you covered this Halloween.

Set in Niagara Falls, Canada, *TSNGC* is the story of Jake Baker's twelfth summer on planet Earth, as relayed by his adult brain-surgeon self years later. If this sentence makes you think that this tale plays with the transitory nature of human memory, you would not be incorrect. It's also a story that tips several of the popular (and now overly familiar) coming-of-age, period piece tropes on their head. This is due primarily to the fact that while *TSNGC* concerns kids, the titular Ghost Club at the centre of it also includes two adults: Jake's conspiracy theorist uncle Cal, who serves as their navigator and guide through the mysterious, and his best friend Lex.

Over the course of the summer, Cal takes the unlikely group of misfits to a number of places that experienced tragedy or purported hauntings, but as the days turn into weeks, things start to feel wrong. Something is off about Cal, and neither Jake nor the reader is able to place a finger on what.

When Davidson eventually circles around to the big reveal at the end of the book (which I won't spoil here), it's amazing how seamlessly it all falls into place – and it becomes evident how much narrative planning and polish the author has put into this story (which the Acknowledgements reveal, not surprisingly, had its start as his PhD thesis).

TSNGC is without question a book about ghosts, only the spectres here don't always take standard corporeal form, because as anyone who's been alive long enough knows: the supernatural is far from the only thing that can haunt us.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

RESURRECTING ROSA MULHOLLAND WITH SWAN RIVER PRESS

If our book feature left you eager to seek out some of our genre's unsung foremothers, Ireland's Swan River Press has just released a dust-jacketed edition of *Not to Be Taken at Bed-time*. Though, fair warning, this beautifully packaged collection of short stories by Rosa Mulholland (1841–1921) is limited to just 300 copies, so don't dawdle!

Publisher Brian J. Showers drops by to give us the view from the other side of the ocean.



How does Swan River select which books to reissue?

Apart from being supernatural, or at the very least fantastically oriented, I think the biggest criterion is that I like the book, that I feel excited about it, and want to share it with others. I tend to worry about readership later. To date, I've reprinted overlooked or forgotten Irish classics by Dorothy Macardle, Lafcadio Hearn, Bram Stoker, Rosa Mulholland, and Mervyn Wall.

What was it about Mulholland's stories that attracted you?

The Mulholland book came on the heels of [the anthology] *Bending to Earth: Strange Stories by Irish Women*. *Not to Be Taken at Bed-time* was originally given limited publication by Sarob Press and edited by the late Richard Dalby, who did the original hard work of assembling Mulholland's supernatural tales. It had been so long out of print, and so expensive second-hand, it made sense to give it another outing with Swan River.

Which is your favourite story from the collection?

I'd probably have to go with the title story. I like Mulholland's stories generally because many of them are set in rural Ireland – keep in mind that Irish writers are not obliged to write about or set their stories in Ireland at all. I also like the way in which she incorporates folklore into her stories or, in the case of "Not to Be Taken at Bed-time," witchcraft.

Apart from Mulholland, who else from the region should we be reading?

I'd direct people to *Bending to Earth*, edited by myself and Maria Giakaniki, which is specifically an exploration of that question: it's got ghosts, decadence, amoeba monsters, doppelgängers, soul transference – something for everyone, really. I think the challenge in finding these stories is that not all authors in the late-19th century specialised in a single genre, but often wrote more broadly. So spending a lot of time in the library, digging deep into the archives for those few suitable stories, is the real trick.

What's coming up next?

Timothy J. Jarvis is editing volume four of *Uncertainties*, our series that showcases contemporary writers of weird, uncanny, and strange tales. We're also working on a deluxe edition of one of J.S. Le Fanu's most popular ghost stories with Matthew Holness [*Garth Marenghi's Darkplace*] and Wireless Mystery Theatre.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

Follow Library of the Damned on Twitter @damnedlibrary

THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

190



THIS MONTH:
THE DEMONIC DEPICTIONS OF NONA LIMMEN

A ROOM OF FEAR COLLECTIBLE



NAME

Nona Limmen

HOMETOWN

"I was born and raised in Beverwijk, a small coastal village close to Amsterdam in the Netherlands."

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"Expired film rolls, grim folktales, turning dreams into reality, trying to find a sense of beauty and mystery in everyday life."

DEEDS

"From the dawn of their legend well through to the medieval ages, female demons have been written of in many texts and were especially popular in Europe. I want to give these powerful deities a platform through my photography. I want them not to be seen as monsters, but as ancient European symbols of women's spiritual abilities and an empowering image of feminine potential."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"Small talk."

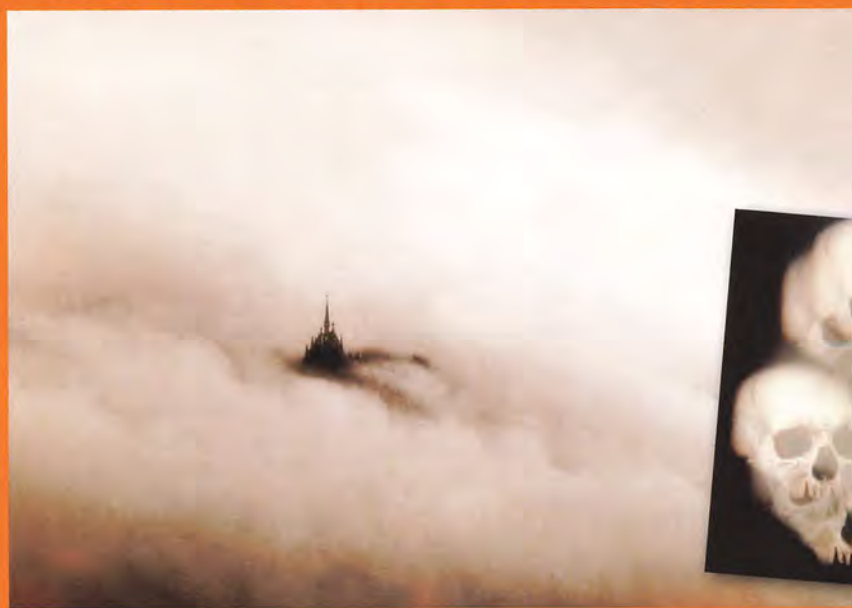
LAST WORDS

"Dream the impossible dream and the world will not grind you under, it will lift you up. This is what all these teachers and philosophers who really counted, who really touched the alchemical gold – this is what they understood. This is the shamanic dance in the waterfall. This is how magic is done. By hurling yourself into the abyss and discovering it's a feather bed."

RESTING PLACE

On Instagram at @NonaLimmen, or nonalimmen.com.

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The Homicidal Homemaker

by
KACI HANSEN

WHERE HOME ECONOMICS
MEETS HORROR!



IN THE 1987 FILM *STREET TRASH*, a case of expired alcohol from the 1960s called Tenaflly Viper is unleashed upon the vagabond community, causing anyone who drinks it to melt away into a hideous rainbow of goo. This cocktail starts off with a bright blue liquor made with butterfly pea flower, which changes to bright purple when you add a squeeze of lime juice! If you want to take it a step further, drop in a fizzing tablet for foaming, colour-changing action, reminiscent of the victims in the film. Cheers!

If you give this recipe a try, let us know! Don't forget to tag your photo with #ruemorgue and #homicidalhomemaker on Instagram and Twitter. 🍷

"STREET TRASH"

- TENAFLLY VIPER COLOUR-CHANGING COCKTAIL

COLOUR-CHANGING TENAFLLY VIPER LIQUOR

- 8 oz. Vodka (or clear alcohol of choice)
- 1/4 teaspoon Butterfly Pea Flower powder

FOR EACH DRINK:

- 2 oz of Tenaflly Viper Liquor
- 1 oz Peach Schnapps
- 1 oz Island Punch Pucker (or any blue-coloured liqueur)
- Flavoured seltzer or lemon-lime soda, to taste
- Squeeze of lime juice

FOR THE TENAFLLY VIPER LIQUOR: Add butterfly pea powder to liquor of choice. Allow to fully dissolve before using.

FOR EACH COCKTAIL: In a glass, add ice and top with Tenaflly Viper liquor, Island Punch Pucker and Peach Schnapps. Fill remainder of glass with seltzer or lemon lime soda. Top with a generous squeeze of fresh lime juice and a fizzing tablet* (if desired) immediately before serving – the cocktail will change colour from deep blue to bright purple!

***FIZZING TABLETS:** Want your drink to fizz, foam, and change colour much like the victims in the film? Mix together 1/2 cup of sweetened instant pink lemonade mix, 1 1/2 teaspoons of citric acid, and 3/4 teaspoon of baking soda. Using a spray bottle, add a very small amount of water, just until mixture begins to stick together like wet sand. Press firmly into small candy moulds and allow to dry for 12 hours. Gently remove from moulds and allow to set for another 12 hours. To serve, drop one fizzing tablet into each cocktail just before serving.

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 RAMONES



AMANDA WYSS
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 Photo by: Tiffany Kyees Photography

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AUDIO DROME

DEADLY DANGEROUS DECENT DULL DRIVEL DOR DEAD ON ARRIVAL

REVIEWS BY JESSICA BUCK, DAKOTA DAHL, ALEX DELLER, AARON VON LIPTON, AND SEAN PLUMMER



NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1990)

Paul McCollough

STRANGE DISC RECORDS

The original *Night of the Living Dead* was a small independent film that relied on stock library music for its soundtrack. Tom Savini's 1990 remake wasn't exactly big budget either, but this time they managed to hire a composer, Paul McCollough, who also wrote the screenplay for George A. Romero's *The Crazies*. McCollough's score is all synth and Carpenter-esque, but definitely sounds like a one-man project, lo-fi, and already dated. Still, there is some underlying brilliance to it, most notably opening track "Cemetery," which plays while a full moon rises over trees, provides one of the film's most chilling moments. *Night of the Living Dead* lacks any dominant, recurring themes, consisting mostly of whooshing ambience and lots of tickling keys, though some decent suspense passages pop up on "Boarding School." Strange Disc's 2XLP, which comes in six different colour variants as well as a black vinyl edition with an obi strip, marks the score's first ever appearance on vinyl. **AVL**



ANOTHER WOLFCOP

Shooting Guns

ONE WAY STATIC RECORDS/CINECOUP

Saskatoon's Shooting Guns quietly released one of the great modern synth scores in *WolfCop* (2014), one that mixed in boozy blues rock in equal measure. For the 2017 sequel, *Another WolfCop*, the stoner rockers give it

a similar howl, mixing early Sabbath with dripping, steady synths straight out of Ennio Morricone and John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Unlike the original film soundtrack, which let progressive electronics and ambience take over side two of the record, *Another WolfCop* is primarily concerned with rock 'n' roll burners that boast a recurring beer-commercial blues flavour, while some lighter synths are used to augment the head noddors. Although it's not as innovative or tasty as the first swig, *Another WolfCop* does manage to capture the sweat 'n' snow atmosphere of a working class bar in the Canadian Prairies, so there's that. The vinyl comes pressed on donut-pink and beer-brown variants and features a cover by artist extraordinaire The Dude Designs. **AVL**



RETURN TO FRIGHTENSTEIN

Anthony D.P. Mann/

Malcolm McDowell

BLEAK DECEMBER INC.

Is there (after)life left in *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*? The horror-themed Canadian kids TV show, which developed a cult following in the decades since its 1971 debut, revolved around the talents of late Canadian comic Billy Van and host Vincent Price, so Bleak December founder Anthony D.P. Mann's resurrection of it as an audio play is a scary gamble. Fortunately, *Frightenstein* love is palpable in this 68-minute production, which sees (hears?) Malcolm McDowell (*A Clockwork Orange*) taking over for Price and Mann voicing the Count and others. The plot finds the Count and Igor throwing a ghoulish ball to raise money to repair Castle Frightenstein, but is primarily a pretext for bringing back the Wolfman, Bwana Clyde Batty, The Librarian, and Grizelda. The sound design and voice work are stellar, but we cannot help but miss Van's manic, improvisational energy. Still, this is a *Return to Frightenstein* worth taking. **SP**



DAGON/ THE CATS OF ULTHAR/ THE MUSIC OF ERICH ZANN

H.P. Lovecraft/Andrew Leman/

Anima Morte

CADABRA RECORDS

Cadabra Records dips into the macabre and cosmic well of H.P. Lovecraft yet again for a triple dose of weird fiction: "Dagon"; lesser-known revenge tale "The Cats Of Ulthar"; and "The Music of Erich Zann," which the label presented previously on side B of a 2016 LP. Frequent Cadabra collaborator Andrew Leman provides narration in a clear and academic tone, while Swedish faux soundtrack instrumentalists Anima Morte perform scores for each story. The music is really the star of the show: on "Dagon," Anima Morte breaks from its usual traditional instrumentation and provides a rumbling, ominous synth score, while "Cats" is a mostly string-based suite with European flair. Finally, on "Erich Zann,"

the band returns to synths but in a mostly traditional cinematic sound. Although the label is double-dipping with "Erich Zann," you can chalk this LP up as another satisfying offering of classic American literary horror for Cadabra. **AVL**



THE YELLOW SIGN

Robert W. Chambers/

Anthony D.P. Mann/

Mauricio Guarini

CADABRA RECORDS

Though his name hasn't survived the annals of pop culture the way other weird fiction alumni have, Robert W. Chambers enjoyed a rebirth recently thanks to *True Detective* Season One, which incorporated his seminal short story collection *The King in Yellow* into its names and plot. Here, Cadabra adapts one of the book's key stories, *The Yellow Sign*, about a sinister church watchman, with Canadian Anthony D.P. Mann providing smooth, enveloping narration capable of bringing listeners

PODCAST SPOTLIGHT



NAME: That's Dark

THEME: Extreme Movies

FREQUENCY: Seasonal & Biweekly

FORMAT: Conversational film analysis

This Toronto-based podcast started as a friendly attempt to traumatize a friend by making him watch an extreme horror movie, but quickly spiralled into some insightful and frank conversations about some of the most intense movies out there. The premise is brilliant: two hosts subject a friend to cinema masterpieces such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, which usually leaves him audibly shaken. The first and only season so far has the three giving their hot takes on films they have recently watched, before taking a breather and coming back with more nuanced reviews. The tone stays casual while the hosts make it very clear that they did their homework, asking questions like whether *A Serbian Film* can be considered an example of Aristotle's dramatic tragedy. A fun way to look at films both critically and through the eyes of someone who hasn't become callously desensitized to gore and sadism, this podcast maintains its jovial and intellectual tone despite the abundantly dark subject matter. **DD**

LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

Horror fans are familiar with the thrill of finding a director's cut of a beloved film, but when was the last time you listened to a composer's cut of one of your favourite movie scores? As a soundtrack collector, this idea obviously excites me, particularly when we're talking about the score for Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (1981), one of the greatest suites of music ever composed in a long line of incredible Italian prog rock scores. That the music from *The Beyond* is such a singular achievement in splatter cinema scores should come as no surprise, considering the musicians behind it: composer Fabio Frizzi backed up by Fabio Pignatelli, Agostino Marangolo, and Maurizio Guarini – all members of Goblin at the time. When I found out Cadabra Records would be handling this release, I had to reach out to the maestro to get the gory details.

As it turns out, the idea of releasing a recut score was actually inspired by Goblin, who have been performing the music from their magnum opus *Suspiria* live at screenings throughout the years.

"In 2013, I had the idea of doing a similar screening for *The Beyond*," explains Frizzi. "In the original movie, director Lucio Fulci, when mixing, didn't include all the music we recorded and it wasn't going to be possible to get on stage and play 35 to 40 minutes for a 90-minute movie. But then my guitarist Riccardo reminded me, 'You are the composer.' The idea became clear to me, to recover all the original score and complete it. It took six months of work, but the result is nice."

After finishing the project, Frizzi initially took the show on the road, and a live recording of his 2016 performance in Austin, Texas, was released on CD from the legendary Beat Records the following year. For these live shows, Frizzi used keyboards to fill in the score's lush orchestral suites, but at a Spanish film music festival in 2017, the composer was able to secure an actual orchestra and choir. After that, he locked himself in his studio to prepare for this uncut release.

Although the Composer's Cut features newly recorded versions of cut material, hardcore horror soundtrack fans can also look forward to hearing completely new sequences fused with the music they know and love as well.

"The famous sequence where spiders devour the poor architect had a somewhat discontinuous musical commentary in the original," says Frizzi. "In this new version, I created a song that grows from beginning to end and has a synchronous closing on the first frame of the next scene. It's always big when audiences hear it – they know the original film by heart."

As is usually the case with vinyl soundtrack projects like this, a lot of effort was put into the LP artwork, and with a movie as colourful as *The Beyond*, the visuals took on renewed importance. The cover is based on the root character of the story – Schweick, artist and accused warlock. The cover concept by artist Jeremy Hush has one foot firmly in 1981 and the other in a timeless abyss.

As for what the late, great Fulci might think of the whole project, Frizzi offers some candid insight based on years of collaborating together.

"I like to think that he would have taken it with his usual sharp irony, but often also self-irony," he says. "But in the end, he would have supported the idea because the end result works."

AARON VON LUPTON



into an admittedly not so accessible story, while Goblin veteran Maurizio Guarini handles the incidental music unobtrusively, tending to repeat certain themes without getting too emotional. Originally released in 2017 and now re-issued with new artwork by Karmazid, Cadabra Records deserves some props for putting effort into bringing this under-discussed yet influential work of horror to life. 3.5/5 AVL



UMBERTO

Helpless Spector

THRILL JOCKEY

LA-based Matt Hill (a.k.a. Umberto, and yep, it's a Lenzi reference) has been a busy fella over the past ten years or so, pumping out weird soundtracks to imaginary films for labels such as Death Waltz Originals and Mogwai's in-house Rock Action imprint, as well as scoring a handful of indie horror flicks and an episode of Hulu's *Into the Dark*. His debut for revered experimental label Thrill Jockey is relatively mellow, building itself up from the ground with hall-of-mirrors synths, pitter-patter electronica and glistening ambience that's partway between Popol Vuh, Angelo Badalamenti, and the dreamy, not-quite-rightness of 1980s Goblin. While perhaps not as audaciously *genre* as, say, the full-blooded surge of *Zombi* or *Deadly Avenger*, *Helpless Spector* actually benefits from the lightness of touch with which it is delivered; it's a record all too easy to drift off into, making the queasy, uneasy underbelly all the more disquieting when you finally notice it's there. 3.5/5 AD



HEATHEN APOSTLES

Dust to Dust

RATCHET BLADE RECORDS

You know when your work friends meet your "real" friends and, miraculously, they all get along? The Heathen Apostles is the musical equivalent, mixing

outlaw Americana with gothic darkness and bluesy rock. Hardly experimental newcomers, *Dust to Dust* is the band's fifth studio album and makes a perfect soundtrack for robbing graves and casting spells. Transition mournful violin into Riverdance-style fiddle? Sure. Throw in some Middle Eastern influence? Why not? Lead singer Mather Louth's vocals slice through the layers like a blade, sharp with a taste for blood. With titles such as "The Bride," "Easeful Death," "Paradise Lost," and "The Fall," the tracklist reads like a stack of classic horror novels. A dour tone is maintained throughout, becoming especially evil in "Home Sweet Holmes," an ode to prolific American serial killer H.H. Holmes. Overall, it's an album to check out, if only to satiate your curiosity. 3.5/5 JB



PLAGUE OF CARCOSA

METAL

Ocean is More Ancient Than the Mountains

SLUDGELORD RECORDS

Plague of Carcosa's doom metal is riddled with references to the strange fiction of Ambrose Bierce, Robert W. Chambers, and H.P. Lovecraft, and it can't be a sinister coincidence that its leader goes by the name of Eric Zann. This latest endeavour pays clamorous homage to glowering Outer God Nyarlathotep ("Crawling Chaos") and mighty Cthulhu ("Madness at Sea") with the band placing two tracks of writhing instrumental heaviness upon the ancient sacrificial altar. While its riffcraft is assured and the songwriting is strong, it's questionable whether the wordless, stripped-down invocations can truly conjure the sense of mounting cosmic madness to which they conceptually aspire. We'll keep a cruel unblinking eye on it, though, just in case, and give this one a few more spins between the impermanent now and the endless, shapeless then. 3.5/5 AD



DARK AMBIENT ARTIST **THE UNQUIET VOID** OFFERS A NEW EP BASED ON THE WORKS OF **ROBERT W. CHAMBERS**

Unearthing the King

BY DEJAN
OGNJANOVIĆ



UNDER THE MONIKER **THE UNQUIET VOID**, ARTIST **JASON WALLACH** HAS BEEN USING DARK AND DISTURBING SOUNDS to transform the works of H.P. Lovecraft into electronic ambient soundscapes for the past fifteen years. Beginning with 2004's *Poisoned Dreams*, based upon the famous Lovecraft tales "Dagon," "The Call of Cthulhu," and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," and up to *The Secrets of Vanished Aeons* (2018), inspired by legendary short novel *At the Mountains of Madness*, cosmic dread echoes throughout these releases with uncanny aural spaces tinged with industrial chaos. Now, The Unquiet Void pays tribute to lesser known but equally weird fiction scribe Robert W. Chambers with *Where Black Stars Rise*, available now in a limited pressing of fifty copies on CD, premiering at NecronomiCon 2019 in Providence, Rhode Island, this August.

Specifically, the six-track EP is inspired by Chambers' 1895 book of short stories, *The King in Yellow*. The album and song titles are taken directly from the text of this seminal work of supernatural fiction, including "The Yellow Sign," "Strange Moons Circle," "In Dim Carcosa," and "The Tatters of the King." Those who have been following the recent revival of interest in Chambers' work shouldn't be surprised to learn that Wallach became interested in this project after seeing the first season of HBO's *True Detective*, which revolves around a villain named the Yellow King and makes reference to the fictional city of Carcosa, as well as other prose from *The King in Yellow*.

"It was like flint and steel, it sparked something in me," Wallach tells *Rue Morgue*. "I was working on a project called *So Comes the Yawning Darkness*, which was my exploration of Nyarlathotep and its relationship to Azathoth from the Lovecraft mythology, so that took a back seat. After reading the story again and with lengthy conversations with author Joe Pulver Sr. [who has written much on Lovecraft and Chambers], and Chambers' great niece Suzanne, I began to get a more focused and precise direction

for the album."

Lovecraft was greatly influenced by Chambers, but the worlds of these two authors have many significant differences. Conveying the sense of the latter's otherworldly Carcosa was musically different than doing the same with Lovecraft's R'lyeh and Leng; in this regard, speaking with Pulver and Suzanne helped Wallach compartmentalize the stories and their concepts, making the music more akin to a sonic journey than a destination.

"Suzanne gave me a more behind-the-scenes take on the family dynamics that may have inspired the novel in the first place," explains Wallach. "Carcosa is a wasted and dreary place that feeds and drains and, metaphorically, people go there at times for various reasons. That, and turning my attention to Cassilda's Song in the novel gave me the idea that I didn't want to make an album based on a book about a play that drives people insane. Instead, I see the song as the process of getting to Carcosa, how it lures you in. That is how I conveyed the cosmic horror and otherworldliness; I had to go to that place and let it out through me and, again, shape it, conceptually, in aural form."

Where *Black Stars Rise* also features an additional track, "Strange is the Night (Where Black Stars Rise)." Immediately following NecronomiCon 2019, the six-song version will be available via digital download from The Unquiet Void Bandcamp page. If there is enough demand, a second pressing of the disc might be a possibility.

Wallach hopes that like-minded audiences will respond to the way The Unquiet Void translates the unnamable and the cosmic into music; a process he admits is no small feat.

"I'll put it this way; it's like a smelting process... taking the raw, untamed core of the concepts and emotions and shaping them into sounds that move and make sense to the projects they correspond to," he says. "It's not an easy thing to do." 🐼

THE UNQUIET VOID



WHERE BLACK STARS RISE

PLAY DEMO

NOW PLAYING > MORTAL KOMBAT II, LAYERS OF FEAR 2



MORTAL KOMBAT 11

PS4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PC
NetherRealm Studios

In the early 1990s, the original *Mortal Kombat* carved out a nice and bloody niche in the arcade fighting scene thanks to its exceedingly gruesome finishing moves ("fatalities") and photorealistic sprite work. Quickly rivaling the popularity of *Street Fighter* and *Tekken*, the series has remained on gaming's bleeding edge for much of its 27-year lifespan, thanks to an unflinching willingness to implement radical change to its hyper-violent formula. With smart improvements to the already excellent framework of their past few titles, NetherRealm Studios have crafted what is arguably their finest fighter yet with *Mortal Kombat 11*.

Playing out like the most elaborate comic book story arc imaginable, *MK11* centres around the appearance of Kronika, Shinobu's mother and the "keeper of time." Erasing the corrupted version of Raiden left over from *MKX*, she inadvertently grabs the attention of *MK2*-era Raiden, who proceeds to bring the younger versions of Liu Kang, Scorpion and Johnny Cage to our timeline. Confused yet?

Although many classic fighters remain on the roster, mainstays such as Reptile and Goro are given the boot in favour of three entirely new playable characters: Cetron, Geras and Kollector. While



the first two are perhaps more *Injustice*-influenced in their design and movesets, the Kollector is a worthy addition to the existing lineup of four-armed combatants.

Fatalities are everything in *Mortal Kombat*, and NetherRealm offers up some of the most gut-churning finishers imaginable here. My personal favourite is D'vorah vomiting bile into her opponent's mouth, which immediately results in a giant bug hatching and savagely clawing its way out of the battered body. *MK11* is a much more colourful



and vibrant game than *MKX*, and its stages and character customization are simply gorgeous. Major gameplay tweaks are also smart, such as the regeneration of missed "fatal blow" attacks.

As a celebration of and tribute to its nearly three decades of existence, *Mortal Kombat 11* proves there's still a ton of life left in this veteran series. Though NetherRealm are unlikely to resurrect Leatherface, Jason or Freddy Krueger as DLC characters for *MK11*, there's still loads of gory glory to be had by horror fans young and old.

EVAN MILLAR



HEADSHOTS: EYE-POPPING VISUALS, KRYPT IS A BLAST TO EXPLORE, BEST FATALITIES EVER
MISFIRES: GRINDING REQUIRED FOR RARER COSTUMES, SOME MICROTRANSACTIONS



LAYERS OF FEAR 2

PS4, Xbox One, PC
Bloober Team

"He who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one, must die." Quotes like this one become a familiar sight in *Layers of Fear 2*, the latest from Polish developer Bloober Team, creator of such intricate stories as 2017's *>observer*. Though it takes a new direction with its storytelling, *Layers of Fear 2* maintains an eeriness that's central to the Bloober feel.

Whisked away from the standard haunted house environment for an ocean liner in the middle of the sea, players assume the role of an actor working with a mysterious director (voiced here by Tony Todd) aboard the ship. The game's time period isn't specified, though it easily fits somewhere in and around the 1940s. This first-person psychological thriller pushes the boundaries of sanity, leaving the story open to a lot of interpretation due to the variety of potential player choices.

If Bloober's games do something very well, it's the atmosphere. Much like its predecessor, *Layers of Fear 2* always creates a dra-



matic mood with its surroundings: the leaking and swaying of the boat, rooms that instantly change when you turn around, forests of mannequins with creakily outstretched arms, the disorienting shift from black-and-white to colour. It's evident that a lot of time was put into setting the tone for each scene; so much so that these environments are almost a character in themselves. Controls are relatively simple, and players can interact with items in their surroundings, run, and

that's about it. There's no combat to be had here, though gameplay is far from boring.

Layers of Fear 2 isn't perfect, however, and there are moments when you'll have no idea what to do or where to go. Also frustrating is the formless figure that appears out of nowhere with little warning and is capable of dishing out instant death. But aside from these points, *Layers of Fear 2* is a devastatingly haunting interactive story that's worth playing through at least once. And hey, maybe play those other Bloober games while you're at it.

D.D. CROWLEY



HEADSHOTS: ELABORATE AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS, INTRICATE STORY
MISFIRES: FRUSTRATING INSTANT DEATHS, SOME IMPORTANT STORY ELEMENTS ARE EASY TO MISS

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HAS HORROR FINALLY BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE MAINSTREAM?

YES!

SEAN PLUMMER

"Horror has been a money-spinning proposition for the studio system since at least 1931, when Carl Laemmle Jr. overcame his father's reservations and greenlit *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*."

FIRST, LET'S CLARIFY OUR DEBATE TERMS. Horror has not *finally* been accepted by the mainstream; horror has *always* been accepted by the mainstream. And what do we mean by "the mainstream"? Are we talking about the movie critics at the "failing" *New York Times*? Or the Oscar voters watching screeners from the comfort of their Beverly Hills palaces, the very ones who prefer to rebrand our genre as "psychological thrillers"?

These distinctions matter because these elites aren't what made big hits out of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Evil Dead*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* or *Get Out*. Nor was it just the horror community, who seek out scares as our primary source of entertainment. There simply aren't enough of us to make that big a difference to Hollywood's bottom line. But horror has been a money-spinning proposition for the studio system since at least 1931, when Carl Laemmle Jr. overcame his father's reservations and greenlit *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Everyone went to see scary movies, and no red-blooded young chap ever let the tut-tutting of a newspaper columnist prevent him from taking his gal to a darkened movie theatre in the hopes that a lumbering monster might make her jump into his arms.

So forget about the think pieces detailing with detached curiosity (and often, condescending amusement) the "new" resurgence of horror thanks to Jordan Peele (but thank you, Jordan Peele). Those stories get written every few years and are cumulatively meaningless. And while you're at it, disregard terms like "elevated horror" for scary movies made by hipster filmmakers looking to move on from the genre as soon as they're able to secure a *Jurassic World* sequel. The masses — and the horror fans, for that matter — want their bloody Blumhouse scares as much as their Marvel CGI marvels.

Horror's gone mainstream? Tell me something new. 🖤

NO!

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

"Horror isn't in the mainstream quite yet, and that's at least partly due to the fact we horror fans don't want it to be there."

WHILE HORROR FILMS OFTEN MAKE A SPLASH IN THE MAINSTREAM CONSCIOUSNESS, the fact that it's still newsworthy when it happens is indicative that the genre simply doesn't get to spend a whole lot of time there. It's \$327 million box office take remains the highest R-rated horror movie gross of all time, but was only the seventh highest overall for 2017. When *Hereditary* started getting critical acclaim last year, horror fans again found themselves dancing the "Elevated Horror Waltz" on social media; arguing that movies needn't "transcend" the genre to be worthy of appreciation. So no, horror isn't in the mainstream quite yet, and that's at least partly due to the fact we horror fans don't want it to be there.

Many of us identify as pop culture outcasts and the horror community

is sort of like an Island of Lost Toys, where horror conventions and film festivals give us a chance to congregate and collectively roll our eyes at those who would make condescending snap judgments about the genre. We spend hours talking online about all the ways that horror is so much more than blood and boobs (and why it can still be a lot of fun when it's not). Living outside the mainstream allows content creators to take more risks and produce the kind of stuff that surprises us in ways that other genres can't.

With the exception of the gatekeeping that occurs (in spite of the fact that the community prides itself in celebrating what the mainstream tends to reject), it makes sense that horror fans are protective of the genre, and work to keep it alive outside of the mainstream.

Horror can be offbeat; it can be niche, it can be fringe. And horror can just be ours, and that's fine by me. 🖤



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SHOULD A HARD LINE BE DRAWN BETWEEN
WHAT IS AND ISN'T "HORROR"?

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NO, PSYCHOLOGY TELLS US THAT OUR MINDS FIND LABELS COMFORTING, BUT HORROR IS NOT A GENRE OF COMFORT.

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